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Yi, Sung B.

Monterey, CA; Naval Postgraduate School

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# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN SOUTH KOREA:  
IMPACTS ON THE U.S.-ROK ALLIANCE**

by

Sung B. Yi

March 2020

Thesis Advisor:  
Second Reader:

Robert J. Weiner  
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**GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN SOUTH KOREA:  
IMPACTS ON THE U.S.-ROK ALLIANCE**

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requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Is there a significant generational difference among South Koreans? If so, how do South Korean generations differ in their perceptions regarding national security? This thesis examines how historical experiences generate a cohort effect on certain age groups in South Korea (Republic of Korea [ROK]), and how these specific cohort effects develop generational differences. Four generations that have unique tendencies and characteristics are identified through cohort experience analysis. The New Generation, those in their 20s and 30s in South Korean society, has anti-North Korean, pro-American, pro-autonomy tendencies. The Democratic Generation, those in their 40s, has pro-North Korean, anti-American, pro-autonomy tendencies. The Transition/386 Generation, those in their 50s, has pro-North Korean, anti-American, anti-autonomy tendencies. Lastly, the War Generation, those in their 60s and older, has anti-North Korean, pro-American, anti-autonomy tendencies. These four generations are then tested using available public-opinion poll data to confirm their expected perceptions on numerous issues regarding 1) North Korea, 2) the United States, and 3) ROK national autonomy—independent from the U.S. influence. The public opinion poll data largely confirm the expected outcome, concluding that the generational characteristics and differences in South Korea could influence the future of the U.S.-ROK alliance.



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFC	Asian Financial Crisis
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GSOMIA	General Security of Military Information Agreement
HRC	Hankook Research Company
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMSC	International Maritime Security Construct
KBS	Korea Broadcasting Service
MBC	Moonhwa Broadcasting Corporation
NK	North Korea
NPT	Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Treaty
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
ROK	Republic of Korea
SK	South Korea
SLBM	submarine-launched ballistic missile
SOFA	Status of Forces Agreement
THAAD	Terminal High Altitude Area Defense
UN	United Nations
UNWFP	UN World Food Program
USAMGIK	United States Military Government in Korea
USFK	United States Forces in Korea



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*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God,  
to those who are called according to His purpose.*

*Romans 8:28*

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# **I. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION**

South Korea, also known as the Republic of Korea (ROK), is a rich and vibrant democratic country, and it remains a strong ally of the United States in Northeast Asia. The ROK is an exemplary case of the developmental state, as the country has shown both rapid economic development and relatively peaceful democratization through free-liberal values.<sup>1</sup> However, as a result of its compressed modernity and its unique situation among its neighboring peer-nations, numerous divided social groups have formed within its society. These divided social groups have different political views, perspectives on North Korea and Korean reunification, priorities in their lives, social values, and perceptions of the United States and the U.S.-ROK relationship.

Social divisions in South Korea can be categorized according to several different factors, such as regional background, political identity, and generational differences. In South Korea, these three categorizing factors are both influential and dominant, such that knowing about these factors can generate a reasonably accurate stereotype about a person, especially on national security matters. Some argue that among these factors, generational differences have the most significant effect on U.S.-ROK security relations and the U.S.-ROK alliance.<sup>2</sup> However, others argue that generational characteristics do not have a significant influence on South Korean security policy and the U.S.-ROK alliance, but only on social and cultural issues.

This thesis will research the significance of South Korean generational effects on the ROK's national security and on the U.S.-ROK alliance, focusing on three outcomes: 1) perceptions of North Korea, 2) perceptions of the United States and U.S. forces in Korea,

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future* (New York: Ecco, 2013), 20.

<sup>2</sup> Rachel Schultz, "Experts: S. Korea's '386 Generation' Favors Kim Regime over U.S.," *Homeland411*, August 8, 2018, <https://homeland411.com/experts-s-koreas-386-generation-favors-kim-regime-over-u-s/>.

and 3) perceptions of ROK national autonomy, in the sense of autonomy from U.S. influence.

The research will first analyze the fundamental question: Is there a significant difference and distinction among South Korean generations? If so, how do South Korean generations differ in their perceptions regarding national security? By identifying generational characteristics and trends on security matters, this research will next answer a final question: what impact do generational differences in the South Korean population have on the U.S.-ROK alliance?

Based on attitudes on these issues, generations may be categorized as more politically left or more right: for example, a generation with stronger pro-North Korea, anti-American, and pro-autonomy attitudes can be described as more left-progressive, and a generation with anti-North Korea, pro-American, and pro-dependence attitudes can be described as more right-conservative. However, this thesis will not use the blanket description of left and right alone to describe generational effects. It will also assess attitudes on issues separately to see whether members of a generation always hold the same combination of attitudes or whether, instead, the generational attitude patterns differ across different particular issues.

## **B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION**

South Korea is a relatively young democracy with a largely segmented and mixed demography. It is a society in which an older generation that remembers the Japanese colonial period and a younger generation that does not even remember the authoritarian military regime live together. In other words, the generation that originated the U.S.-ROK alliance and the generation that currently sustains the alliance have different motives and attitudes toward the alliance and toward national security. Meanwhile, the 386 Generation, who fought against the authoritarian regime and for the democratization of South Korea in the 1980s, has become the most influential age group governing South Korea at this

moment. As Lankov points out, South Koreans in their 50s, the *386 Generation*, continue to hold progressive perspectives toward North Korea and the U.S.-ROK alliance.<sup>3</sup> Notably, this particular generation shows an unusual departure from the expected aging effect, in which older generations tend to be (or become) more conservative than younger ones; and this raises the question of whether an extra cohort effect helps this generation resist the anticipated aging effect. Similarly, the youngest political generation in South Korea, widely known as the *Give-up generation*, has emerged as a significant political actor since the candlelight vigil surrounding Park Geun-hye's impeachment in 2017 and the election that year of current President Moon Jae-in.<sup>4</sup> Many speculate as to whether this youngest political generation will have as clear a stamp of generational politics as its predecessors. As such, assessing South Korean generational differences can provide an explanation of left/right conflict on the issues of national security and insights about generational behavior.

Since the U.S.-ROK alliance was first established in 1953 as a bulwark against a communist North Korea, it has expanded to comprehensive cooperation and partnership in many different global aspects, including trade, security, climate, and development. The role of the United States has largely stayed the same in the alliance, but the ROK's role has been radically changed in the last half-century with the rapid development of its economy and the achievement of modern democracy. In South Korea, with its liberal democracy, public perception and opinion play a significant role. Answering the research question about generational differences in South Korea could help us better understand social attitudes in Korean society and their likely trajectory in the future, toward the end of forging better U.S.-ROK relations.

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<sup>3</sup> Andrei Lankov, "Understanding S. Korea's '386 generation' and pro-north activists," *The Asian*, September 17, 2013, <http://www.theasian.asia/archives/83188>.

<sup>4</sup> Steven Denney, "South Koreans Can't Agree What Democracy Is," *Foreign Policy*, March 13, 2017, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/03/13/south-koreans-cant-agree-what-democracy-is/>.

## 1. Changed Situations and Generational Gap

The world situation has radically changed since the alliance was first established in 1953, and there is a significant gap in perceptions, values, and priorities between the generation that initiated the U.S.-ROK alliance and current generations that may want to reestablish the objectives and responsibilities of the alliance.

Three major changes have impacted the traditional U.S.-ROK alliance. First, South Korea achieved its “miracle of the Han river:” rapid industrialization and economic development. After the Korean War, South Korea was “the poorer half of one of the poorest countries in the world.”<sup>5</sup> It was an underdeveloped, rural, and less-democratic society. Now, South Korea is part of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and G20, with one of the most influential economies in the world and a high level of democratization.<sup>6</sup> With its improved capacity and democratization, South Korea may seek more autonomy and self-interested diplomacy outside of U.S. influence. This self-interest creates friction and tension in the U.S.-ROK relations, as highlighted in the 2006 Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations and recent defense cost-sharing negotiations.<sup>7</sup>

Second, the Cold War ended, and the Soviet Union collapsed along with the spectre of communism. Through this victory, the United States and its allies enjoyed *Pax Americana*, a unipolar world-order in which U.S. values of a free-liberal economy and democracy presided over the globe. However, this meant the greatest common security threat of the alliance no longer existed, threatening loss of the alliance’s purpose and meaning—especially when the young generations of South Korea did not understand the ideological battle against communism in the Cold War era and instead saw communist and former-communist nations as global economic partners.

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea: From the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 167.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 167.

<sup>7</sup> Uk Heo and Terence Roehrig, *The Evolution of the South Korea-United States Alliance* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 244–253.

Third, new threats to the alliance emerged. North Korea, or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), enjoyed relatively better conditions than South Korea until the 1970s. However, it started to suffer in overall capacity relative to South Korea, especially upon the Soviet Union's decline and the ROK's rapid development in the 1980s. This created a perceptual discrepancy between older and younger South Korean generations, since one remembers North Korea as a real existential threat while the latter no longer thinks of North Korea as a real threat. Also, the DPRK started to rapidly increase its nuclear weapons capability since the 1990s. Despite a series of nonproliferation efforts, the DPRK announced in 2017 that it now possesses strategic nuclear armaments and intercontinental delivery methods that can reach the continental United States.<sup>8</sup> The original intent of the U.S.-ROK alliance was to focus on deterring North Korea from hostile actions against the South; but now, with a direct nuclear threat to the U.S. mainland, the importance of the U.S.-ROK alliance has increased even further for its ability to let the United States monitor North Korea from its close proximity. Also, the rise of China provides a new challenge to the 65-year-old U.S.-ROK alliance. China's ambition to become a regional and global power exerts pressure on the South Korean economy and its politics, which also drives uncomfortable tension between the United States and South Korea, as exemplified by recent increase South Korean hedging largely influenced by a left-leaning political generation—the 386 Generation.

## **2. Generation in Power: Progressive 386 Generation**

The 386 Generation is the core group that started and organized the anti-American movement of the 1990s through the 2000s. Its members rose to significant political power as they drove the triumph of Roh Moo-hyun in the 2002 presidential election. After that, the 386 Generation began to take major roles in political office, including the President's cabinet. For example, current President Moon's first Blue House staff included 41 out of 60 members from the 386 Generation.<sup>9</sup> Along with its willingness to work with North

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<sup>8</sup> Uk Heo and Terence Roehrig, *The Evolution of the South Korea-United States*, 144.

<sup>9</sup> Gye-man Kang and Soo-hyun Oh, "Members of President Moon's 1<sup>st</sup> Blue House Staffs," *Ray The P (MK News)*, October 11, 2017, <http://raythep.mk.co.kr/newsView.php?cc=&no=14910>.



Korea, the 386 Generation is thought to have left-leaning and autonomy-seeking tendencies (in the sense of autonomy from the United States). This attitude has created a foreign policy divergent from the traditional U.S.-ROK alignment—a departure from the approach of older generations.

Over the last sixty-five years of the U.S.-ROK alliance, there has been increasing pushback by an autonomy-seeking South Korean population against the ROK's heavy reliance on the U.S.-ROK military cooperation. Anti-American sentiment gradually grew among South Koreans as they struggled for democratization against their authoritarian military government in the 1980s. South Koreans were unhappy that the United States remained silent on humanitarian violence issues regarding the ROK's non-democratic regime, justified by an ideological fight against communism.<sup>10</sup> Anti-American sentiment peaked in 2002 after a U.S. Army truck accidentally struck and killed two schoolgirls, and the soldiers involved were released with no charge. This incident triggered widespread South Korean public resentment regarding what was perceived as the unfair terms of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and its customary extraterritoriality for U.S. troops.<sup>11</sup> Growing up amid such anti-American rhetoric, young South Koreans, including both the 386 Generation and post-386 generations, started to question the necessity and purpose of the U.S.-ROK alliance—an alliance that for older generations was fixed as a component of national identity and rarely questioned.

This generational division between a more pro-American older age group and a more anti-American (or, more precisely, pro-autonomy) younger age group suggests another significant question: Is there a cohort effect that might negatively impact the U.S.-ROK alliance and the U.S.-ROK relationship? And should policymakers in the United

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<sup>10</sup> Kang-Ro Lee, "The Analysis of the Developmental Process of Anti-Americanism in South Korea," *Korean Journal of International Studies* 44, no.4 (December 2004). 250–251.

<sup>11</sup> Yonhap, "Korea-US SOFA compared to Japan and Germany." *Hankyoreh*, December 10, 2002, <http://legacy.www.hani.co.kr/section-003000000/2002/12/003000000200212101735037.html>.

States consider this effect among the 386 generation and post-386 generation when constructing the South Korea policy?

### 3. The Give-up Generation: Receding from 386 Generation

“Give-up Generation” is new terminology referring to younger South Koreans—those in their 20s and 30s. The term “give-up” refers to the social phenomenon of young people’s hopelessness due to high unemployment rates and social inequality in South Korean society. This generation was born into an already-wealthy South Korea and has only known South Korea as such. As a result, this generation might hold higher standards—and, in turn, stronger disappointment. By its high standards, this generation never has seen a strong economy. The Give-up Generation’s members, in general, feel that “they have been abandoned by their government and corporations.”<sup>12</sup> In concept, they are similar to Japan’s *satori sedai* (variously translated as both the “enlightened” and “resigned” generation). On issues of national security, the Give-up Generation is thought to have a more anti-North Korean perspective, and not as strong ethnic-nationalist and anti-American attitudes—the opposite of the 386 Generation.

However, as highlighted through the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) crisis in 2016 and the Boycott Japan movement in 2019, South Korean society has become more polarized through nationalism. Park describes this new social phenomenon as conservatization rooted in *practical nationalism*, as distinct from the older generation’s *resistance nationalism* rooted in anti-Japan sentiment or anti-imperialism with a catch-up mentality.<sup>13</sup> South Korean attitudes towards Japan provide a good metric to measure the effect of nationalism within generational differences, as South Korean nationalism stemmed from the anti-Japanese movement during the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945). The older generation, which directly remembers the influence of Japan

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<sup>12</sup> Hyung-a Kim, “The seven-Give-up Generation,” *PolicyForum*, August 26, 2015, <http://www.policyforum.net/the-seven-give-up-generation/>.

<sup>13</sup> Sun-Young Park, “Shinsedae: Conservative Attitudes of a ‘New Generation’ in South Korea and the Impact on the Korean Presidential Election,” *EWC Insights* 2:1 (September 2007), 2.

as a colonizer and oppressive invader, has an extremely hostile and competitive attitude towards Japan, but this resistant nationalism against Japan faded as the generations progressed. Unlike this resistance nationalism, the new practical nationalism is based on confidence and national pride, with the belief that Korea is no longer inferior to other big-power nations.<sup>14</sup> The new generation in South Korea seems to be the driving force behind this new form of nationalism, in which accepting foreign culture is not inconsistent with openly condemning foreign governments actions (as illustrated, for example, by drinking Starbucks and eating McDonald's after participating in a candlelight protest against the United States).<sup>15</sup> With this practical nationalism, the young South Korean generation seems to have transitioned away from historical, ideological, and cultural antagonism. As shown in Table 1, younger South Koreans in their 20s seem to have weaker animosity towards Japan as a nation, compared to other age groups. Also, the same table shows that people in their 20s hold a more benign perception toward Japanese people, unlike other age groups.

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<sup>14</sup> Sun-Young Park, "Shinsedae," 2.

<sup>15</sup> Sun-Young Park, "Shinsedae," 2.

Table 1. Public Opinion Poll Data: South Korean Perception of Japan and Japanese People (July 2019)<sup>16</sup>

		Perception of Japan				Perception of Japanese people			
		N	Like	Dislike	No answer	N	Like	Dislike	No answer
Total		1000	12%	77%	10%	1000	41%	43%	17%
Region	Seoul	194	16%	76%	9%	194	43%	39%	18%
	Gyeong-gi	305	13%	77%	10%	305	41%	41%	18%
	Gangwon	30	-	-	-	30	-	-	-
	Chung-cheong	105	8%	79%	13%	105	38%	43%	19%
	Jeolla	99	5%	84%	11%	99	35%	45%	20%
	Gyeong-buk	100	16%	78%	6%	100	39%	51%	10%
	Gyeong-nam	154	14%	76%	11%	154	44%	43%	13%
	Jeju	13	-	-	-	13	-	-	-
Age-group	19-29	173	15%	69%	16%	173	51%	29%	19%
	30s	168	10%	78%	13%	168	40%	43%	17%
	40s	197	14%	80%	6%	197	41%	44%	15%
	50s	200	9%	82%	10%	200	43%	41%	15%
	60s and older	261	13%	78%	9%	261	32%	51%	18%
Political Identity	Conservative	239	16%	75%	9%	239	41%	43%	15%
	Center-middle	320	12%	79%	10%	320	44%	39%	17%
	Progressive	281	11%	83%	6%	281	45%	43%	12%
	None	160	10%	68%	22%	160	26%	49%	25%

Note 1: Table reconstructed from Gallup Korea data, the original data shows age-group as decades (30s, 40s, etc).

Note 2: The original data has not given statistics for sample size smaller than 50.

## C. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, the definition of generation in sociological terms, along with related phenomena such as cohort effects and aging effects, will be first discussed. These ideas have been well developed both in general and regarding South Korea by scholars including Mannheim (1952), Inglehart (1997), and Park (2017). After establishing key terminology

<sup>16</sup> Adapted from Gallup Korea, "Daily Opinion (20190712)," July 2019, <https://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=1031>.

and concepts, different classification methods of South Korean generations will be compared and contrasted. In the process of discussing the classification of generations, this research will review existing literature on what it means to be on the *left* or the *right* in South Korea—which differs from corresponding labels in the United States—at each historical epoch.

### **1. Definition of Generation, Cohort, and Aging Effects**

In “The Problem of Generations,” Karl Mannheim, a Hungarian-German sociologist who first analyzed the social effects of generations, defines a socio-political generation using three concepts: generation status, generation as actuality, and generation units.<sup>17</sup> According to Mannheim, a generation is formed by individuals who were born in a specific time period (status), in a shared social community with unique culture and consciousness (actuality), and who are then collectively mobilized as multiple cultural, social, and political action groups (units).<sup>18</sup> In his writing, particularly in describing a generation as a birth group, he claims that a generation is a social location (status) like one’s social class:

Belonging to the same generation or age group...endow [s] the individuals sharing in them with a common location in the social and historical process, and thereby limit [s] them to a specific range of potential experience, predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action.<sup>19</sup>

In general, the notion that aging beyond a young age helps encourage conservatism can be regarded as conventional wisdom.<sup>20</sup> Added social responsibilities and psychological resistance to change and uncertainty lead to conservatism as people get older. However, Mannheim opposes a traditional explanation that the younger generation is

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<sup>17</sup> Karl Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations,” in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1952), 302.

<sup>18</sup> Karl Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations,” 302–304.

<sup>19</sup> Karl Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations,” 291.

<sup>20</sup> Norval Glenn, “Aging and Conservatism.” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 415 (1974), 176.

always more progressive while the older generation is always more conservative.<sup>21</sup> While he agrees that the socio-political tendencies of an age group depend on their experiences in their youth (between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five), he believes this experience shapes a unique set of values that lasts a long period of time—even offsetting the aging effect of conservatism.<sup>22</sup>

Also, Mannheim claims that since multiple polarities of ideological units coexist within a generation, not every age-location group creates “new collective impulses and formative principles original to itself;” and that on the occasions where it happens, the tempo of social change plays a decisive role.<sup>23</sup> In the case of rapid social and cultural transformation, the latent and continuous natural adaptation from one generation to another is no longer possible, so that a clearly distinguishable new impulse is consolidated as a new generation style.

The definition and characteristics of generation identified by Mannheim are confirmed by Inglehart’s theory of intergenerational value change. Inglehart explains the generation effect with two related hypotheses: a scarcity hypothesis and a socialization hypothesis. According to Inglehart’s scarcity hypothesis, an individual places priority on what he/she had in relatively short supply.<sup>24</sup> This suggests that one’s values reflect the socioeconomic environment in which one is living. The socialization hypothesis “holds that one’s values reflect the conditions of one’s pre-adult years,” creating a substantial time lag between the socioeconomic environment and value priorities.<sup>25</sup> These hypotheses emerge from Maslow’s concept of a “need hierarchy,” which holds that human needs are ranked, and that lower needs must be fulfilled before one pursues higher needs.<sup>26</sup> Inglehart regroups Maslow’s five hierarchical needs—physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-

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<sup>21</sup> Karl Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations,” 297.

<sup>22</sup> Karl Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations,” 300.

<sup>23</sup> Karl Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations,” 309.

<sup>24</sup> Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 33.

<sup>25</sup> Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization*, 33.

<sup>26</sup> Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization*, 33.

actualization (Figure 1)—into two value groups: materialist values (physiological and safety), and post-materialist values (love, esteem, and self-actualization).



Figure 1. Maslow's Need Hierarchy<sup>27</sup>

In the 1990s, Inglehart argued, “as a result of the rapid economic development and the expansion of the welfare state that followed World War II, the formative experiences of the younger birth cohorts in most industrial societies differed from those of older cohorts in fundamental ways that were leading them to develop different value priorities.”<sup>28</sup> From this argument, he concludes that materialistic society would phase out with global industrialization, and that new post-modern and post-material values were emerging.<sup>29</sup> Inglehart argues that with more economic stability and a sense of physical security, people tend to give higher priority to the quality of life, following Maslow.<sup>30</sup>

Inglehart compares forty-three countries worldwide and finds a common generational formation among these countries. People in older generations, who

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<sup>27</sup> Source: Saul Mcleod, “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs,” *Simply Psychology*, May 21, 2018, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/simplypsychology.org-Maslows-Hierarchy-of-Needs.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization*, 4.

<sup>29</sup> Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization*, 324.

<sup>30</sup> Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization*, 33.

experienced poverty, war, and insecurity during their youth, develop materialistic values which emphasize economic growth, religious beliefs, and national security; and people in younger generations, who were born amid prosperity and stability, pursue post-materialistic values such as political activism, social diversity, environmental protection, and quality of life.<sup>31</sup>

However, Inglehart's assessment was published in 1997, more than two decades ago. With a series of global economic crises in the 2000s, growing inequality, and the recent emergence of Great Power Competition, people in younger generations have experienced increased insecurity and may be drawn back toward materialistic values. This generational transition from an older materialistic generation to a post-materialistic generation up until the 1990s and then to a more recently-emerged and more materialistic younger generation can also be found in South Korean society.<sup>32</sup>

Park Jae-heung, following Mannheim and Inglehart, formulates a definition of generations to assess South Korean society in particular. According to Park, a generation is:

1. A group of people who were born at a similar time in a specific society and shared historical and cultural experiences.
2. A group that has similar perspectives and action patterns over a long period of time.
3. A group that has a "consciousness of kind" with other members in its birth cohort.<sup>33</sup>

Park also claims that South Korean society is a good case study supporting Inglehart's theory of intergenerational value change. The older generation, which had experienced the Japanese colonial period, Korean War, poverty, and social instability, should have distinctively different values from the younger generation, which had experienced rapid economic growth in a more stable mass-consumer society and did not experience the suffering of the older generation. Noteworthy here is that Inglehart's 1995

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<sup>31</sup> Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization*, 34–35.

<sup>32</sup> Sun-Young Park, "Shinsedae," 2–3.

<sup>33</sup> Jae-Heung Park, "Generation Composition in the South Korean Society," *Literature and Society* 18, no. 3 (August 2005), 175.



analysis showed that South Korea had the largest difference in generational values among the 44 countries for which he had gathered data.<sup>34</sup>

The term “generation” is often used interchangeably with “birth cohort” or “cohort” by sociologists. A cohort is “a group of people who have shared some critical experience during the same interval of time,” recalling Mannheim and Inglehart “generation.”<sup>35</sup> In turn, a cohort effect, as described by Alwin and McCammon, is “a distinctive formative experience which members of a birth cohort...share that lasts—and marks them—throughout their lives.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, this thesis uses the terms “birth cohort” and “cohort effect” as equivalent to “generation” and “generational effect.”

## **2. Methodology for Classifying South Korean Generations**

Classifying populations into generations requires a high level of prudence since one cannot distinguish one generation from another simply by drawing lines to divide a timeline. People are constantly being born into the world, and their experience cannot be perfectly differentiated based on their birth year.<sup>37</sup> However, a generational study cannot be conducted without setting *some* breakpoints between the generations. Scholars dividing society into different generations have used a variety of methods. Table 2 consolidates various methods that are used to classify generational groups in South Korea in particular.

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<sup>34</sup> Jae-Heung Park, “Intergenerational Change and Postmaterialism in Korea: Cohort Analysis,” *Korean Journal of Sociology* 46, no. 4 (August 2012), 72.

<sup>35</sup> Duane Alwin and Ryan McCammon, “Generations, Cohorts, and Social Change,” in *Handbook of the Life Course*, ed. Jeylan Mortimer and Michael Shanahan (Boston, MA: Springer U.S., 2003), 26.

<sup>36</sup> Duane Alwin and Ryan McCammon, “Generations, Cohorts, and Social Change,” 26.

<sup>37</sup> Jae-Heung Park, “Generation Composition in the South Korean Society,” 176.

Table 2. Labels and Key Characteristics of Generations in South Korea<sup>38</sup>

Organizational Standards		Generational Labels	Key Characteristics
Historical Experience	Historical Events	Korean War gen, 4/19 gen, Yushin gen, IMF gen, W-gen, R-gen, City Hall-gen	- Good representation of cohort perspective - Focus on experiences based on political, economic, cultural events and situations - Low market usability
	Time Periods	Industrial, Democratization, Post-Cold War, Baby-boomers, 386-gen, 88-manwon generation	
Age and Stages of Life	Age-groups in Decades	2030-Gen (age group in their 20s and 30s), 5060-Gen, 1020-Gen	- Dual representation of age/cohort effects - Ideological tendencies - Different marketing objectives
	School Grade Level	1318 (mid-high school), 1315 (middle school), 1618 (high school), 1924 (College)	- Dual representation of age/cohort effects - Different marketing objectives
	Life Stages	Young Adults, College students, Older populations, Silver-ages	
Cultural/Behavioral Characteristics	Cultural Identities	Shinsedae, X-gen, N-gen, Digital-gen, IP-gen, P-gen, Web2.0-gen, Silk-gen	- More general expression for cultural/behavioral characteristics - Different marketing objectives
	Market Behaviors	P-gen, WINE-gen, MOSAIC-gen, 2.0-Consumers	- Based on sample researches - Different marketing objectives

According to Park, there are three major methods of classifying different generations: by historical experience, age/life stages, or cultural/behavioral characteristics. Generational classification based on historical experience is the method most widely used in social science. As described by Mannheim and Inglehart, this method uses crucial group experiences in history as the marker to differentiate groups.<sup>39</sup> This method is suitable for identifying cohort effects in social and political phenomena, including generational perspectives on national security.

<sup>38</sup> Adapted from Jae-Heung Park, *Generational Difference and Conflict: Theory and Reality* (세대차이와 갈등: 이론과 현실) (Jinju, Korea: Kyungsang University Press, 2017), 87.

<sup>39</sup> Jae-Heung Park, "Generation Composition in the South Korean Society," 176.

The method of using age and life stages to classify the generation is often used to emphasize the aging effect, which looks for differences in sociopolitical maturity level.<sup>40</sup> Also, this classification method focuses on different generational traits at different chronological periods. For example, when the 2030-generation (age group in their 20s and 30s) was referred to in 2000, this generation was characterized to focus on newly emerged lifestyles and different value priorities from the older generations. When the same 2030-generation was referred to in 2002 during the FIFA World Cup and 16<sup>th</sup> presidential election, this generation was characterized as the key player for reform and as a hope for the future. In 2005, the same 2030-generation was characterized as a main target in the consumer market. As such, the method of using age and life stages as a classifying factor has a specific use in differentiating one group from others at a certain time period, but it is not suitable for the purposes of this thesis research since this research seeks to identify specific age-cohorts and their generational effects on national security issues.<sup>41</sup>

The method of using cultural/behavioral characteristics is widely used in marketing research or media to emphasize spikes of cultural or behavioral effects of certain age groups. *Shinsedae*, literally a “new generation,” became a token word to characterize iconoclastic young adults in their early 20s in 1993. Discussing and understanding *shinsedae* was a social phenomenon in the 1990s and early 2000s, because this new generation seemed to display significant differences from older generations (including from the 386 Generation) and a sudden departure from the anticipated trajectory of societal progression. However, as the term *shinsedae*, quickly became widely consumed in media and marketing firms, it started to lose its original impact. As a result, new labeling was constantly invented to replace this “new generation,” such as X-generation, N-Generation, W (World Cup)-generation, R (Red devil)-generation, P (Patriotic/Pragmatic)-generation, and City Hall (Candlelight)-generation.<sup>42</sup> This method of classifying generation is also not suitable for the purposes of this thesis research since each of these different classification phrases of a

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<sup>40</sup> Jae-Heung Park, *Generational Difference and Conflict: Theory and Reality*, 89.

<sup>41</sup> Jae-Heung Park, *Generational Difference and Conflict: Theory and Reality*, 90.

<sup>42</sup> Jae-Heung Park, *Generational Difference and Conflict: Theory and Reality*, 92.

new generation is simply an overused expression created by media and marketing firms, not distinguishing the actual generational differences. Thus, for the purpose of this research, a more comprehensive and accurate classification of generations—which also take an emphasis on their political/security characteristic—is needed.

### **3. Classification of Generations in South Korea**

Many scholars, who attempted to classify the South Korean generations, have agreed that the historical experience method captures the most comprehensive generational effects in the South Korean society—especially on generational perspectives on the national security issues. Within the historical experience, there are two different categories of experience that scholars used to explain the cohort effects. One category is ideological/political cohort experiences such as anti-communism and authoritarianism during the military regimes in South Korea. Another category is economic cohort experiences such as growth in the people's income level, economic development, and economic crises. In summary, the generational classification study conducted by selected scholars (Park, Choi, Hong, and Denney) is consolidated in Figure 2. To provide historical context to these generational classifications, key events and government administration information is overlaid on generation blocks.

Birth Year	1930	1935	1940	1945	1950	1955	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000																																																																																																																																							
Gov't	Japanese Colony (1910-1945)			U.S. Military Gov't (1945- 1948)	Rhee Syng-man (1948-1960)			Park Chung-hee (1963-1979)			Chun Doo-Hwan (1980-1987)		Roh Tae- Woo (1987- 1993)	Kim Young- sam (1993- 1998)	Kim Dae- Jung (1998- 2003)																																																																																																																																							
Key Events	<div><div>▲</div>Liberation (1945)</div>															<div><div>▲</div>Korean War (1950-53)</div>															<div><div>▲</div>4.19 Revolution (1960)</div>															<div><div>▲</div>Vietnam War (1964-73)</div>															<div><div>▲</div>Yushin Order (1972)</div>															<div><div>▲</div>5.18 Uprising (1980)</div>															<div><div>▲</div>June Uprising (1987)</div>															<div><div>▲</div>Seoul Olympic (1988)</div>															<div><div>▲</div>OECD Joining (1996)</div>															<div><div>▲</div>IMF (1997)</div>														
Park (2017)	Colonization/ War (1910-1940)		Industrialization/Democratization (1941-1970)										Post-Ideological/Information (1971-)																																																																																																																																									
Choi (2015)						Babyboomer (1955- 1961)		386-gen (1962-1969)		X-gen (1970-1978)		N-gen (1979-1992)																																																																																																																																										
Hong (2003)	Industrialization (-1952)					Dem Phase 1 (1953-1960)		Dem Phase 2 (19661-1969)		Information (1970-)																																																																																																																																												
Denney <sup>a</sup> (2015)	Older Authoritarian (-1950)					Authoritarian (1950-1959)		Transitional (1960-1969)		Democratic (1970-1985)			Give-Up <sup>b</sup> (1986-)																																																																																																																																									
Yi <sup>c</sup> (2020)	War Generation (-1959)							Transitional/386 (1960-1969)		Democratic (1970-1980)		New Generation (1981-2000)																																																																																																																																										

<sup>a</sup> Denney has taken the original classification from Dalton, Russell and Doh Chull Shin. "Growing up Democratic: Generational Change in East Asian Democracies." *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 15, no. 3 (September 2014): 345–372.

<sup>b</sup> Denney did not specify the birth years, but it was calculated from the referred age-group at the time of his proposal (Age 20–29 group at 2015).

<sup>c</sup> Yi's proposal for this thesis research.

Figure 2. Classification of South Korean Generations

a. *Ideological/Political Cohort Experiences*

Park Jae-heung classifies South Koreans into three big generations. As graphically depicted in Figure 2, first is Colonization and War generation, including people born in 1910–1940. Next is Industrialization and Democratization generation, with people born in 1941–1970. Last is Post-ideological and Information age generation, with people born in 1971 to current.<sup>43</sup> Park believes the post-ideological generation will continue in the South Korean society until the next ground-breaking historical event, such as Korean reunification, that could cause another cohort experience. He uses the political environment in South Korea and its associated ideology as two methods to classify generations. For the first generation, he uses Japanese colonial rule and War-time governance as key historical environments that have structured the “Colonization and War” generation. Also, Park uses ethnic nationalism and anti-communism as fundamental ideologies during those times. For the second generation, Park uses authoritarian dictatorship, military coup’s, and the era of democratization protests as key political environments. He associates the rise of liberalism and national autonomy/autarky as fundamental ideologies. For the last generation, he identifies progressive administrations, 1988 Seoul Olympic and 2002 FIFA World Cup, and candlelight vigils as key political and social environments that shaped the generation. Park claims three ideologies as the fundamental ideological perspective of this generation: consumerism, individualism, and anti-authoritarianism.<sup>44</sup>

Similarly, Choi Ji-young and her team use the political cohort experiences driven by key historical events as the classification factors. Choi divides South Korean society into four generations, and this classification is graphically presented in Figure 2.<sup>45</sup> First is Babyboomer generation (born in 1955–1961), who experienced the authoritarian Yushin order (1972) and 5.18 Uprising (1980) against the authoritarian suppression during their high-school years. Second is 386-generation (born in 1962–1969), who experienced June Uprising (1987), a public protest that brought the end of the authoritarian military

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<sup>43</sup> Jae-Heung Park, *Generational Difference and Conflict: Theory and Reality*, 100.

<sup>44</sup> Jae-Heung Park, *Generational Difference and Conflict: Theory and Reality*, 99.

<sup>45</sup> Jiyoung Choi, Heejoo Cheon, and Myoung-jin Lee, “A Comparative Study of the Civility Across Generations in Korean Society,” *Korea Journal of Population Studies* 38, no. 4 (December 2015), 121–22.

government, and 1988 Seoul Olympic as they were young. The third is X-generation (born in 1970–1978), who experienced both a stable and prosperous society as South Korea has joined the United Nations (UN) and OECD as well as financial decline during International Monetary Fund (IMF) crisis. Fourth and last, N-generation (born in 1979–1992) has nourished the full-tide of globalization highlighted by the 2002 FIFA Korea-Japan World Cup and the spread of the internet. As being the child of baby-boomers, N-generation shows very distinct generational characteristics from their parents' generational characteristics.<sup>46</sup> Choi does not classify beyond the N-generation due to insufficient data available on the younger population under the voting age.

***b. Economic Cohort Experiences***

As classifying the difference between generations, Choi and her team also account for the income level of South Korean citizens when each generation has entered the working-age. In their research, Choi correlates the economic level of each age-group with their generational characteristics in terms of autonomy and civility. Babyboomer generation (1955-1961) had an income level of \$563-\$1,686. Next, 386-generation (1962-1969) had an income level of \$1,842-\$4,653, and X-generation (1970-1978) with \$5,718-\$12,059. Lastly, N-generation (1979-1992) had an income level of \$7,989-\$24,302. Choi concludes in her article that as the income level increased, generational perceptions on autonomy and civility have also increased—with the exception of N-generation.<sup>47</sup> Autonomy and civility rating has rather decreased for N-generation, showing much more similarity with the rating of Babyboomer generation. She explains this with similarity in the social environment that N-generation is experiencing with those of Babyboomer had experienced. Babyboomers entered into the labor market with full of uncertainty and competition. This similar economic setting is repeating for N-generation. Although N-generation makes more than ten-fold of Babyboomers made at the time, people in N-generation see a less optimistic future in an already fully saturated economy.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Jiyoung Choi, Heejoo Cheon, and Myoung-jin Lee, “A Comparative Study of the Civility,” 121–22.

<sup>47</sup> Jiyoung Choi, Heejoo Cheon, and Myoung-jin Lee, “A Comparative Study of the Civility,” 130.

<sup>48</sup> Jiyoung Choi, Heejoo Cheon, and Myoung-jin Lee, “A Comparative Study of the Civility,” 131–32.

Another scholar, Hong Duk-ryul investigates generational classification using economic cohort experience. As graphically depicted in Figure 2, he divides the South Korean society into Industrialization generation, Democratization generation (two sub-generations during this period), and Information Age generation.<sup>49</sup> First is Industrialization generation, consists of people who achieved the industrialization during their prime age, anyone born before the year 1952. The main concern of the Industrialization generation was a struggle for daily survival and protecting their family through extreme uncertainty and poverty.<sup>50</sup> Hard labor and sacrifice for the future became the norm of this generation, and its first priority became the escape from poverty. This social atmosphere was the backbone of the industrial movement under President Park Chung-hee.<sup>51</sup>

The next classified generation is the Democratization generation. This generation consists of people who were born between 1953 and 1969.<sup>52</sup> Although this generation widely shares the same principles and values across within the group, Hong suggests dividing the Democratization generation into two groups based on economic experiences. The earlier age-group, who were born between 1953 and 1960, is named “first phase” of Democratization generation, and later age-group, who were born between 1961 and 1970, is named “second phase” of Democratization generation.<sup>53</sup> The first phase generation is synonymous to Baby-boomers, who still had memories of poverty and physical deprivation. People who formed the first phase generation have internalized both industrialization values and democratization values and eagerly fought for prospering and stable lifestyle as well as more freedom under the democracy.<sup>54</sup> The second phase generation is synonymous to 386-ers, who was brought up with more stability in their life compared to the first phase.

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<sup>49</sup> Duk-ryul Hong, “Korean Society and Generations Research (한국사회의 세대 연구),” *Critical Review of History* (August 2003), 161.

<sup>50</sup> Duk-ryul Hong, “Korean Society and Generations Research,” 162.

<sup>51</sup> Duk-ryul Hong, “Korean Society and Generations Research,” 163.

<sup>52</sup> Duk-ryul Hong, “Korean Society and Generations Research,” 168.

<sup>53</sup> Duk-ryul Hong, “Korean Society and Generations Research,” 168.

<sup>54</sup> Duk-ryul Hong, “Korean Society and Generations Research,” 171.



Also, under the 1981 Education Reform, the college education became widely available to the population, and the second phase generation was the first group that entered college more universally. As college students and white-collar workers, second phase generations started to organize into political groups in the school and civil society, and they joined the fight against the violence and suppression along with the first phase generation.

Hong classifies the last generation as Information Age generation, which consists of everyone who was born after 1970. As the second phase of democratization generation was the first generation to escape from poverty and starvation, this younger age-group is the first generation who was raised in economic prosperity and consumeristic society. Economic spending has progressed from fulfilling material needs to indulging cultural and service needs. Socially, the internet and personal computer became the norm of Information Age generation. Getting information became easier than ever, and worldwide communication was at the people's fingertips. This generation started to make trips to foreign nations without any constraints and easily accepts the different cultures and ideas. Thus, the Information Age generation differs from the previous two generations that young South Koreans are now expressing themselves and fulfilling emotional values.<sup>55</sup>

Steven Denney largely takes a similar generational classification and explanation from existing studies, but he concentrates on another generation that has recently formed—the youngest generation.<sup>56</sup> He has borrowed the label for this new generation, Give-Up generation, from the phrase what the young South Koreans are referring to themselves. This generation was brought up in the reshaped society where the liberal-democratic mode of government was structured after the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis.<sup>57</sup> Asian Financial Crisis, which is known as the IMF crisis to most South Koreans, signaled the end of industrialization and the rapid development era of previous generations. After economic

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<sup>55</sup> Duk-ryul Hong, "Korean Society and Generations Research," 183.

<sup>56</sup> Steven Denney, "Bringing Generational Analysis Back In? An Interview with Shelley Rigger," *SINO-NK*, January 18, 2016, <https://sinonk.com/2016/01/18/bringing-generational-analysis-back-in-an-interview-with-shelley-rigger/>.

<sup>57</sup> Steven Denney, "Number of Irregular Workers Continue to Rise in South Korea," *The Diplomat*, November 10, 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/11/number-of-irregular-workers-continue-to-rise-in-south-korea/>.

reformation happened during the IMF crisis, South Korean society had no more “lifetime jobs” or “iron rice bowl,” which the people are guaranteed to keep employed until their retirement age with social benefits provided, such as pensions and insurances. Instead, many of the workforces were replaced by irregular workers, who are either on sub-contract or a short-period contract. This new system makes the labor market more flexible, but increase instability and inequality within the society.<sup>58</sup> Give-up generation South Koreans were raised in this unhappy childhood. They are currently working part-time jobs to pay college tuition, but even if they graduate from college, they cannot get a good job. Therefore, South Koreans in the 20s and 30s are started to believe that they are forced to give up life events such as marriage, owning a home, and raising children.<sup>59</sup> Denney characterizes this young generation as more active in politics than its predecessors, to overcome and change the “Hell Chosun,” a reference to the rigid social hierarchies with no hope.

These studies have several characteristics in common. First, they agree upon a generational gap between people who have experienced extreme poverty and those who have not (that is, between people who were born before and after 1960). Second, a generational gap between people who have lived their younger adult lives under authoritarian rule and those who have not (people who were born before and after 1970). Last, there is a new generation currently emerging, the youngest generation, that seems different from its predecessors.

With this general consensus in mind, this thesis research proposes four generational classifications, also shown in Figure 2: the War Generation, the Transition/386 Generation, the Democratic Generation, and the New Generation. The War Generation consists of people who were born before the year 1960. This generation might also be known as the Cold War ideology generation, and it represents elders in current South Korean society over age 61. The Transition/386 Generation includes people who were born between 1960

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<sup>58</sup> Steven Denney, “Number of Irregular Workers Continue to Rise in South Korea.”

<sup>59</sup> Kookmin Ilbo, “The young and sick. ‘5-po’ to ‘7-po,’ the ‘give up’ generation,” August 28, 2015, <http://news.kmib.co.kr/article/view.asp?arcid=0923219431&code=11131100&cp=nv>

and 1970 (and retains “386” to allow continuity with existing discussions on generational dynamics, where “386” is perhaps the only universally-used term). This generation’s members struggled to achieve democratization in the 1980s and are currently in the age between 51 to 60. This research will classify the next decade’s cohort as the Democratic Generation, born between 1970 and 1980. These South Koreans, where the majority of people in their 40s, likely have political characteristics similar to 386 Generation but social characteristics similar to the younger generation. Finally, the New Generation consists of people born after 1981, who are currently in the age between 21–40. This generation is expected to be found to support new changes in the old order and to challenge perceived irrationalities therein, such as corrupt officials, unfairness, and social injustice. In Chapter II, these proposed generational classifications will be analyzed in detail.

#### **4. Classification of Left and Right in South Korea**

When discussing generational effects on politics in South Korea, it will be important to both connect these to and differentiate them from more familiar progressive-versus-conservative political-spectrum influences. Attitudes toward the U.S.-ROK alliance and security dependence on the United States are key factors dividing progressives from conservatives in South Korea. South Korea also displays stronger associations of apparent left/right characteristics with people’s region and generation, and weaker associations with policy and ideology, than in most consolidated democracies.

As Seymour Lipset claims, the political left and right are a by-product of modern industrial society.<sup>60</sup> In European society, the political spectrum typically reflects a division based on socioeconomic class and economic/material matters, such as distribution versus growth, labor versus capital, and state versus the market.<sup>61</sup> However, in the South Korean case, political ideologies are often associated with different age groups and generations who hold historical and ideological traces. For example, members of what this thesis will

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<sup>60</sup> Seymour Lipset, “Cleavages, parties and democracy,” in *Party Systems and Voter Alignments Revisited*, ed. Lauri Karvonen and Stein Kuhnle (London: Routledge, 2001), 6.

<sup>61</sup> Won-taek Kang, “Generation, Ideology and Transformation of South Korean Politics,” *Korean Party Studies Review* 4, no. 2 (August 2005), 195.

call the War Generation are often referred to by their political opponents as “extreme reactionaries” (수구꼴통) who still hold glorious memories of an authoritarian regime, while members of what this thesis will call the Transition/386 Generation are often called “Pro-North Korean Sympathizers” (종북) by opponents pointing out cooperative gestures towards North Korea.

Among the many issues over which the South Korean left and right sharply disagree, the ROK’s relationships with North Korea and the United States are perhaps the ones over which attitudes diverge the most. Kang Won-taek relates these divergent views on North Korea to a generational conflict over political ideology—an ideological fight between anti-communist old conservatives and anti-authoritarian young progressives.<sup>62</sup> The conservative right takes a harder line toward North Korea, driven by anti-communism, while progressive left takes a more engagement-friendly line toward North Korea, driven by the genuine support for North Korean citizens and lack of anti-communist ideology. Thus, Kang explains, conservatives in South Korea still hold fundamental values of anti-communism and authoritarian social order as their core beliefs. At the same time, the political left, the progressives, holds fundamental beliefs supporting disbanding outdated Cold-War era anti-communism and all remnants of South Korea’s authoritarian period. One example of pro-engagement progressive policies is President Kim Dae-jung’s Sunshine Policy toward North Korea. The Sunshine Policy is a Korean version of Détente: a warm-hearted gesture and peaceful engagement to North Korea that aims to gradually reduce the tension and encourage reforms within the North by establishing economic and cultural links.<sup>63</sup> Another example is President Moon Jae-in’s commemoration of Kim Won-bong during his Korean Memorial Day speech.<sup>64</sup> Kim Won-bong was a Korean independence activist during the Japanese colonial period. Although he had many achievements as an independence activist, his name was rarely brought up in South Korean history because he became a leader of the North Korean Communist Party after the

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<sup>62</sup> Won-taek Kang, “Generation, Ideology and Transformation of South Korean Politics,” 197.

<sup>63</sup> Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 243.

<sup>64</sup> Cheong Wa Dae, “Address by President Moon Jae-in on 64th Memorial Day,” June 06, 2019, <https://english1.president.go.kr/BriefingSpeeches/Speeches/602>.

Liberation.<sup>65</sup> President Moon Jae-in's commemoration of Kim Won-bong signifies that progressive's step toward leaving outdated ideological conflict and revise the history which was written during the conservative authoritarian regimes.

The youngest, "New" Generation members identify as firm supporters of a strong and independent Korea, but at the same time as "national security conservatives" on North Korean issues, like older anti-communist conservatives.<sup>66</sup> Denney claims that the New Generation both takes a more hardline approach toward North Korea and believes that a Strong Korea means an independent Korea and that this belief comes from their experience growing up with South Korea as a major power in the region. To these young South Koreans in their 20s, the concept of a strong Japan is not in their memory, and China is not as advanced as South Korea industrially, culturally, and technologically.<sup>67</sup> Their perception is much different than that of previous generations, and this new perception is driving their self-confidence and emphasis on an independent South Korea.<sup>68</sup>

Meanwhile, South Koreans traditionally have held strong pro-American feelings based on a strong alliance with the United States, which helped protect and nurture South Korea during and after the Korean War. However, a growing segment of the population expresses skepticism toward the United States, or in more extreme cases and in the eyes of stronger conservative critics, has been turning anti-American. Hahm Chai-bong argues that this is due to different strains of nationalist ideology, which he argues help form the foundations of a deep cleavage between South Korean conservatives and progressives.<sup>69</sup> In the early days of the ROK, South Korean nationalism was built around the concept of anti-communism, industrialization, and democracy. Hahm argues that early conservative and progressive activists shared this nationalism, but with different priorities.

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<sup>65</sup> Sung-eun Lee, "Lawmakers slam Moon for Memorial Day address," *Joongang Daily*, June 10, 2019, <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=3064077>.

<sup>66</sup> Steven Denney, "South Korea: The New Nationalism in an Era of Strength and Prosperity," *SINO-NK*, March 28, 2013, <https://sinonk.com/2013/03/28/sk-nationalism-in-strong-and-prosperous-state/>.

<sup>67</sup> Steven Denney, "South Korea: The New Nationalism in an Era of Strength and Prosperity."

<sup>68</sup> Steven Denney, "South Korea: The New Nationalism in an Era of Strength and Prosperity."

<sup>69</sup> Chaibong Hahm, "The Two South Koreas: A House Divided," *Washington Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (Summer 2005), 58.

Conservatives supporting authoritarian leader Park Chung-hee prioritized industrialization and development, while progressives supporting anti-regime figures (and eventual presidents) Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung prioritized democratization. However, neither right nor left had anti-American sentiments because they both saw the United States as a security and economic benefactor.<sup>70</sup>

The next generation of progressives was different. Rapid industrialization in the 1960s and 1970s left dark blots and fierce scars on South Korean society, such as inhuman labor conditions and dehumanizing repression by the authoritarian military regime. The younger generations who grew up amid this social turmoil began to search for deeper structural causes, and they blamed what they saw as the imperialistic interests of the United States and the scourge of the capitalistic system. Hahm argues that anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist nationalism quickly spread, especially at universities, and that these new progressives believed themselves to be the only true nationalists following the direct lineage of colonial-period anti-Japanese freedom fighters.<sup>71</sup> Chun's bloody repression of public demonstrations in Gwangju only confirmed young progressives' idea that the United States was supporting a brutal dictator in South Korea to maintain U.S. imperialistic hegemony in East Asia against the Soviets.<sup>72</sup> It followed that progressives in South Korea were linked with anti-American attitudes – and the American presence also became linked with pro-North Korean attitudes, since North Korea, unlike South Korea, had not allowed foreign troops on its soil or compromised its autonomy and sovereignty due to the influence of superpower nations.<sup>73</sup>

In summary, South Korean conservative attitudes can be seen as rooted in an older South Korean national identity and ideology, based on development, authoritarianism, and

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<sup>70</sup> Chaibong Hahm, "The Two South Koreas: A House Divided," 60.

<sup>71</sup> Chaibong Hahm, "The Two South Koreas: A House Divided," 61.

<sup>72</sup> Chaibong Hahm, "The Two South Koreas: A House Divided," 62.

<sup>73</sup> Chaibong Hahm, "The Two South Koreas: A House Divided," 62.

anti-communism. Progressives have confronted this tradition and called for change, prioritizing welfare, egalitarianism, and reconciliation with North Korea.<sup>74</sup>

The unique history of South Korea has thus created a different kind of nationalism for older and younger generations, and these nationalisms have helped drive the split between—and correlated with—political left/right divisions in South Korean. Therefore, this research will analyze the left/right characteristics associated with the generations and assess how these left/right ideologies intertwine with each generation’s security policy and perception.

#### **D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESIS**

This thesis aims to assess the generational effects on security issues. It first investigates whether or not a significant aging or cohort effect exists on these issues in South Korea. The null hypothesis is that no distinct difference exists among South Korean age cohorts with regard to security. That is, this thesis will investigate whether *any* difference seems to exist, even if modest.

Public opinion poll data are analyzed to investigate this. Also, the historical case analysis is pursued to collect evidence that either rejects or supports generational effects—for example, whether the Transition/386 Generation exhibited coherent political behavior during the 17th and 18th Presidential elections.

In order to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that a generational influence on national security issues does exist, the public opinion poll data and case analysis of security issues, such as policies toward North Korea and U.S. forces in Korea, should show coherent trends according to age-cohorts, whether in alignment with or distinct from the effects of political left and right.

#### **E. RESEARCH DESIGN**

This thesis first conducts an in-depth assessment of different South Korean generations and whether and how each generation displays different perceptions. By

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<sup>74</sup> Chaibong Hahm, “The Two South Koreas: A House Divided,” 65.

analyzing high-impact events and crises in South Korean history, key generational characteristics that shaped specific cohorts' experience will be identified. Once South Korean generations are defined and qualitatively analyzed, open-source public opinion poll data are used to quantitatively assess predicted generational effects and their impacts on security issues including 1) people's perceptions of North Korea, 2) perceptions of the United States and the U.S. Forces in Korea, and 3) perceptions on ROK national autonomy and their ability to achieve a self-help national security. Opinion polls are used from Gallup Korea, Asan Institute, and other reputable news media. When needed, their data will be reconstructed to show how results vary according to generation, as newly delineated by this study, and by region, partisan identity and other relevant factors.

Although there was a recent scandal in South Korea regarding the credibility of domestic opinion polls. *Joongang Daily*, a major news media agency in South Korea, recently published a journal article criticizing some polling agencies that their survey method is vulnerable to intentional "manipulation."<sup>75</sup> However, even if the poll data results are distorted due to political pressure, the data credibility and argument in this thesis would not be affected. This thesis only analyzes the difference in data points within a data set (between age-groups, regions, and self-identified political identities) and not comparing general results between different opinion surveys. Thus, unless the "manipulation" is targeted to a specific age group or a region, which is highly unlikely, the data analysis in this thesis is not affected by the credibility criticism.

Also, since this thesis only analyzes the existing opinion polls from polling agencies, the questions asked in the poll data are not a perfect fit to assess the generational perceptions in three criteria. The quality of analysis could be enhanced by creating dedicated questionnaires and conduct an opinion polling with a scientifically constructed methodology. However, this thesis has carefully selected the only significant opinion polls among a large pool of data depository to maximize the credibility and accuracy of the analysis.

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<sup>75</sup> Tae-yoon Kim, Hyun-joo Choi, Il-hoon Hyun, Kook-hee Son, "18% P difference in opinion polls according to 'Are people asked by machines?'," *Joongang Daily*, November 06, 2019, <https://news.join.com/article/23625445>.



## **F. THESIS OVERVIEW AND OUTLINE**

The thesis will be composed of four chapters. The remainder of the thesis will consist of three additional chapters to characterize, analyze, and evaluate the generational differences in South Korea.

Chapter II differentiate and identify the generational characteristics of the four South Korean generations. First, this chapter examines the South Korean history to identify cohort experiences from historical events and social environment. Then, the generational characteristics are assessed using the identified cohort experience, which forms distinct identities and tendencies on social, economic, and security issues for each generation. Also, the chapter concludes with comparisons of generations based on their political tendencies, identifying how much impact a generational difference can create on South Korea politics through assessing historical voting results and population size.

Chapter III provides an in-depth analysis of the generational effect on numerous security issues that South Korea faces. This chapter analyzes the public opinion poll data to test the security perception of each generation that is identified in Chapter II. Also, through trend analysis of various poll data, this chapter assesses how much consistency is in the South Korean generational perspectives on North Korean issues, U.S.-ROK relationship issues, and South Korean autonomy issues.

Finally, the thesis concludes with Chapter IV, summarizing the findings and supporting evidence. In this last chapter, the thesis provides recommendations for U.S. policymakers on what to expect from the upcoming, currently-younger South Korean generations, and what the United States leadership and Department of Defense should do with this in mind in order to continue and strengthen the U.S.-ROK alliance.

## **II. FORMATION AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SOUTH KOREAN GENERATIONS**

### **A. PROPOSED CLASSIFICATION OF SOUTH KOREAN GENERATIONS**

Karl Mannheim and Ronald Inglehart both suggest that the generations are formed from the shared cohort experiences. Also, many scholars have attempted to identify and characterize the generational differences in South Korea, as those were briefly discussed in the previous chapter. However, what specific events and historical experiences have formed different national security perceptions among the South Korean populations? What historical contexts have created a shared cohort experience that affects the generational perceptions toward North Korea, the United States, and the ROK security autonomy?

Based on the analysis of ideological/political experiences, economic experiences, and social experiences over the last century of South Korean history, this thesis proposes to divide the South Korean population into four generations. For each generation, the key historical experiences that created a cohort effect on that generation will be discussed. Then, distinctive generational characteristics that are created by the cohort effect will be analyzed. Also, at the end of the historical examination, the four generations will be compared and contrasted to assess the differences in their generational characteristics.

Although the generational discussion will be comprehensive as it will include social, political, and economic cohort experiences, the main focus of this thesis is about different generational perceptions on the national security issue. Thus, some generational characteristics that are irrelevant to the U.S.-ROK alliance and national security will be carefully omitted from the discussion. Also, the cohort experience is defined by Mannheim as experience in people's youth between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five (17-25), but this thesis uses experience in people's youth between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five (15-25) for easier calculation, with some vague overlaps between generations.<sup>76</sup> A person's life experience is influenced by many different factors at different times of life, so the life experience of one who was born a day earlier would not be radically different

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<sup>76</sup> Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," 300.

from the life experience of another who was born a day later. Therefore, the born-year range of a generation should take as a rough reference of a general mass who had similar experiences, with indistinct borders between the generations.

### **1. War Generation (Age: 61 and Older)**

The War Generation was born before 1959. Everyone in this generation had finished its formative (age 15–25) period by the mid-1980s and is currently age 61 or older (if, for simplicity's sake, this thesis counts everyone's birthday as being January 1).

The first half of twentieth-century history is not cheerful moments for Korea. Korea was a victim of the imperialist powers that scourged into the Asian land and waters. Being unable to modernize in time and defend its sovereignty, Korea was eventually colonized by its neighbor, Imperial Japan. After World War II, Korea liberated from the Japanese occupation. However, the nation was soon divided into half by the two superpower nations—the United States and the Soviet Union, and eventually became the site of an ideological proxy war. After three years of tragic war experience, South Koreans had to suffer from both internal and external existential threats—unstable domestic politics and extreme poverty, as well as the North Korean aggression. From these experiences, South Koreans, who were born before 1959, became highly interested in materialistic values, physical stability, and the Cold-War ideology.

Also, another key highlight of War Generation is that this generation has lived through three social ages: Agrarian, Industrial, and Information. As a result of compressed modernization of South Korea, people from the War Generation were born in agrarian society, worked in industrial society, and spending their sunset years in the information society.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, it is natural that this older generation kept the agrarian value of tradition and Confucian-style ruler–subject relations. Also, the War Generation values the stability and social order over individual rights. This tendency stems from the cohort effect that the War Generation has suffered from numerous sudden political/societal revolutions and periods of re-adaptations, and the tendencies reinforced by the aging effect, as they

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<sup>77</sup> Duk-ryul Hong, “Korean Society and Generations,” 158.

gradually became the oldest generation in the South Korean society. To the War Generation, physical security, social stability, and economic growth are the top priorities, even if the civil rights or individual freedom are compromised. These priorities were a good-match with the authoritarian-style growth model—which gave public legitimacy to the South Korean authoritarianism.

*a. Historical Events and Unique Social Experiences*

(1) Legacy of the Japanese Colonial Period and the Liberation of 1945

Although there are not many survivors in the War Generation who actually lived through the Japanese colonial period. Even if there are, they would be at least 90 years old now. However, the legacy of the Japanese colonial period and Liberation has its biggest impact on the War Generation, as people from the War Generation had more interaction daily with those who lived through this period and experienced the tragic outcome originated from this period.

Living through the Japanese colonial period, South Koreans have developed a strong sense of ethnic nationalism and this led the War Generation to perceive entire Korea (both North and South) as one ethnic-nation, not as separated states. During the Japanese colonial period, Koreans were an ethnic group without a nation. Korea had many centuries of autonomy as an ethnic nation-state, and Koreans shared a unique culture, language, and heritage from other nations (i.e., China, Japan). Until the colonial period, the Korean nation had unified government for more than 1,000 years, and Korean ethnicity was stabilized with well-defined territorial boundaries.<sup>78</sup> Thus, losing sovereignty and nation by the imperial power sparked two distinctive reactions: the rise of moderate and radical nationalisms. The rise of these two different types of nationalism planted the seed for the tragedy of the divided nation. By the 1920s, there was a division among Korean intellectuals and nationalist activists, between Western-looking moderate nationalists and more radical nationalists who took their inspirations from the Soviet Union and

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<sup>78</sup> Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 3–4.

communism.<sup>79</sup> Although their ultimate goals were different, these two nationalists groups both shared a short-term goal under the Japanese colonial period: independence and reestablishment of the Korean ethnic-nation state. With this deep ideological trench between two different nationalist groups left unresolved, Korea gained liberation in 1945 with Japan's surrender.

## (2) Ideological Battle and Korean War

Similar to other newly formed modern states after World War II, Korea also became a vicious battleground between two ideologies: free-liberal democracy and communism. Once Korea liberated from Japanese occupation, the United States and the Soviet Union decided to temporarily divide the Korean peninsula along the arbitrary 38<sup>th</sup> parallel line to disarm the remaining Japanese forces in Korea.<sup>80</sup> Although it was not intended, this line became the ideological border between the free-liberal South and the communist North when two sides conducted their own election and declared a state in 1947–1948.<sup>81</sup> South Korea, under the influence of Rhee Syng-man and the United States Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK), became a free-liberal democracy. However, President Rhee's political ground was still weak and unstable, and he needed more consolidated power to defeat his opponents and the communists. Thus, he was not reluctant to use ideological politics to oppress opponents and control the newly formed nation.<sup>82</sup> From this political and social environment, the War Generations grew up under the national priority of anti-communism and “march north and unify Korea (북진통일).”<sup>83</sup>

Before the Korean War broke out, the border between the two Koreas was much more porous than today. During this period, many communists from the South fled to the North, and free-liberal activists from the North fled to the South. However, people still

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<sup>79</sup> Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 58.

<sup>80</sup> Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 94–95.

<sup>81</sup> Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 102–03.

<sup>82</sup> Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 107–08.

<sup>83</sup> Scott Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads: Autonomy and Alliance in an Era of Rival Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 20.

believed that this division is temporary, and soon Korea will be unified under one ethnic-nation state. Many War Generation South Koreans were still lived in North Korea at this time. They saw their friends, neighbors, and families were getting suppressed and purged by communist extremists. Also, in the South, the War Generation had experienced riots and strikes led by discontent labor workers and communists that caused many casualties in Yeosu, Daegu, and Busan.<sup>84</sup> Finally, in June 1950, the Korean War broke out. During the war, it was natural to put the defense of the nation and the obedience to order above individual rights and civil liberty. Also, the military-style authoritarian leadership and the anti-communist sentiment were widely utilized to consolidate the nation and fight the war against the same ethnic Koreans—sometimes against one’s own family and neighbors. After the war, the North Korean aggression persisted, exemplified by the 1968 USS Pueblo incident and assassination attempts in the same year by North Korean infiltrators to Blue House (*Cheong Wa Dae*), the South Korean Presidential Office. Thus, the wartime social environment of ideological authoritarianism and heavy control has continued to ensure security and stability, and this environment became the foundation of authoritarian regimes in Korea after the war.

### (3) Earlier Authoritarian Regimes

Most of everyone born in 1959 or earlier experienced their formative years (age 15–25) under the authoritarian regimes of Rhee and Park, whose rule ended in 1979. Early days of the authoritarian government were justified by the hostile geopolitical environment that ROK faced and the Cold War ideological confrontation, especially from the direct threat from North Korea.<sup>85</sup> This national threat from North Korea and the ideological battle against the communist front led the deployment of South Korean troops to Vietnam in 1964. The decision was made by President Park Chung-hee, “motivated by his drive to build legitimacy, lift Korea out of poverty, and prevent U.S. disengagement from Korea.”<sup>86</sup> His

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<sup>84</sup> Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 104.

<sup>85</sup> Scott Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads*, 16–17.

<sup>86</sup> Glen Back, “A Perspective on Korea’s Participation in the Vietnam War,” *Asan Institute for Policy Studies*, April 09, 2013, <http://en.asaninst.org/contents/issue-brief-no-53-a-perspective-on-koreas-participation-in-the-vietnam-war/>.

motivation for the Vietnam War provides a good summary of the historical environment that South Korean authoritarian regimes were facing at the time.

Similar to other authoritarian states, South Korean authoritarian leaders also used force and violence to oppress their oppositions and maintain domestic stability. In return, authoritarian governments were focused on overcoming the existential threat problem and achieving economic development to maintain its popular legitimacy. Before achieving the miracles of the Han river with their hands, the people from the War Generation struggled for its daily survival. The starvation and poverty were common, and people had faced some serious military threats from North Korea, such as secret infiltration attempts and provocations at sea.<sup>87</sup> With a devastated post-war economy, early ROK governments were heavily dependent on the U.S.-ROK alliance for its security and economy.<sup>88</sup> Between 1953 to 1961, a total of \$ 1.9 billion of U.S. aids was poured into South Korea to reconstruct and keep it from collapsing.<sup>89</sup> Also, during the same period, U.S. aids consisted of approximately 40% of the ROK national budget.<sup>90</sup> People from the War Generation remembers the United States as the protector and benefactor of South Korea, as their life was once sustained by the support from the United States.

The ROK economy finally took off in 1962 as President Park Chung-hee took power through a military coup and conducted developmental reforms. The rapid industrialization under the authoritarian rule is a key phenomenon of the War Generation cohort experience, as it was the hard work and sacrifices of the War Generation that built the foundation of South Korea's development from the ashes of war.<sup>91</sup> According to World Bank data, South Korea had a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of merely \$100 in

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<sup>87</sup> Uk Heo and Terence Roehrig, *The Evolution of the South Korea-United States*, 140.

<sup>88</sup> Scott Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads*, 16–17.

<sup>89</sup> Uk Heo and Terence Roehrig, *The Evolution of the South Korea-United States*, 163–64.

<sup>90</sup> Uk Heo and Terence Roehrig, *The Evolution of the South Korea-United States*, 163–64.

<sup>91</sup> Jae-Heung Park, *Generational Difference and Conflict: Theory and Reality*, 64.

the early 1960s, but it increased by 100-fold by 1994 with GDP per capita of \$10,205, which again doubled by 2006.<sup>92</sup>

However, behind these shining achievements, there were issues that were developed in the shadows, such as corruption, power abusing, social inequality between business and laborer, and human rights violations. Also, President Park declared the Yushin order in 1972, which began the dictatorship and ended the quasi-democracy that was achieved through the 4.19 Revolution. Eventually, the social resistance against the rapid industrialization and the suppression of civil liberty has developed, and this social movement became the political backbone of the anti-authoritarian progressives in South Korean politics. This explains why the War Generation is not completely conservative in current South Korean politics.

#### (4) 4.19 Revolution

Sometimes it is overshadowed by the strong conservatism of the War Generation that this older generation was the first generation who experienced a series of public protests against the dictatorship. Longing for liberal democratization usually only ties with the 386-generation, but it is important that without the War Generation setting the precedents, the 386-generation could not have achieved the full democratization during its time.<sup>93</sup>

One key historical event of this democratic movement is the 4.19 Revolution in 1960. President Rhee Syng-man, at the end of his third elected term, was not yet ready to step down. Coming to the 1960 Presidential Election, Rhee had lost popular support for his corruption and abusive power. However, he manipulated the election and won his fourth term in March 1960.<sup>94</sup> Responding to this fraud election, angry public stormed out to massive protests around the entire country. The demonstration peaked on April 19, 1960,

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<sup>92</sup> “GDP per capita (Current US\$) – Korea, Rep.,” World Bank, accessed December 09, 2019, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?end=2018&locations=KR&start=1960>.

<sup>93</sup> Duk-ryul Hong, “Korean Society and Generations,” 166.

<sup>94</sup> Michael Robinson, *Korea's Twentieth-Century Odyssey* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 122–23.



where tens of thousands of students came out to protest, and President Rhee proclaimed Martial Law and mobilized military.<sup>95</sup> Eventually, with domestic and international pressure, Rhee resigned and left Korea for exile in Hawaii. The 4.19 Revolution signifies the first successful democratic movement against the illegal authoritarianism in ROK. Also, the 1960 revolution was largely led by students, and the students of 1960 are in their 70s and early 80s in today—which is not a small age-cohort in South Korea. In sum, the War Generation holds strong value in the stable social order through some level of authority, but the people from the War Generation want this authority under the frameworks of democracy.

***b. Generational Characteristics***

Analyzing the historical events, the generational characteristics of the War Generation can be identified as four major categories based on its unique experiences. Table 3 shows the analyzed cohort effects caused by social environment and cohort experiences.

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<sup>95</sup> Michael Robinson, *Korea's Twentieth-Century*, 125–26.

Table 3. Generational Characteristics of the War Generation

Key Cohort Environment	Key Cohort Experience	Event Year	Cohort Effects
Japanese Occupation		1910-1945	(1) Ethnic Nationalism (1) Anti-Japanese Nationalism
	Liberation	1945	(4) Ideological Conflict
	Korean War	1950-1953	(4) Anti-Communism (4) Pro-American (1) Reunification
Rhee Syng-man Administration (Authoritarian)		1948-1960	(2) Materialistic Survival (Poverty, Security) (4) Anti-North Korea (4) Pro-American
	4.19 Revolution	1960	(3) Democracy Movement
Park Chung-hee Administration (Authoritarian)		1963-1979	(3) Industrialization (2) Development (Improving Life Standard) (3) Controlled Society
	Troops in Vietnam War	1964-1973	(4) Anti-Communism (4) Supporting Alliance (3) Enhanced National Status
	Blue House Infiltration	1968	(4) Anti-North Korea
	USS Pueblo Incident	1968	(4) Anti-North Korea
	Yushin Constitution Reform	1972	(3) Civil Liberty Restrictions

Note: (1) through (4) indicate four categories of the generational characteristic

The first category (1) of the generational characteristic of the War Generation is the ethnic nationalism. The Korean ethnic-nationalism was developed through the Japanese colonial period, stemmed from the anti-Japanese, anti-Imperialist ideology. Along with strong anti-Japanese sentiment, the War Generation also believes that two Koreas should be reunified as one ethnic nation-state—because Koreans are one ethnic group despite the ideological differences.

The second category (2) of the generational characteristic is the War Generation's priorities on survival and materialistic stability. The War Generation went through wars and extreme poverty in their formative years. Also, in fact, North Korea had a better economy and military power than South Korea through the 1970s, so people from the War Generation lived in constant fear of another potential North Korean invasion or sudden

collapse of the free-democratic ROK government by communist spies.<sup>96</sup> Thus, this real security threat and material deficiency formed a shared social mentality of “development-first, get out of poverty,” even it required personal sacrifices and limited civil rights.<sup>97</sup>

The third category (3) of the generational characteristic is the War Generation’s leaning support for the legacies of authoritarian periods. The War Generation grew up and became the conservatives in the ROK society holding the legacies from their formative experiences. These legacies are strict yet stable society, strong national security, ideological superiority over communism, loyalty to the nation, and achieving rapid industrialization under authoritarian developmental policies.<sup>98</sup> Later, this generation became the political stronghold for the conservative parties and government administrations (i.e., Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye), that kept their political lineage to the achievements of authoritarian regimes.

The fourth category (4) of the generational characteristic is strong anti-communists, anti-North Korean, and pro-American values. Experiencing the Cold War environment, people from the War Generation became somewhat zealous about its ideological belief. For example, under the authoritarian regime, if one showed a slight tint of anti-Americanism, that person automatically got branded as a communist and North Korea sympathizer. To the War Generation, the United States is the great benefactor that preserved the free-Korea and provided food aids, and the U.S.-ROK alliance signifies the true friendship between the two nations—mostly unquestioned.<sup>99</sup> However, this thesis does not factor out the different views within the generation. As shown through the 4.19 Revolution, the War Generation also supports democratic values and progressive agendas. However, in general, more conservative tendencies are expressed by the majority of the War Generation.

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<sup>96</sup> Uk Heo and Terence Roehrig, *The Evolution of the South Korea-United States Alliance*, 141.

<sup>97</sup> Duk-ryul Hong, “Korean Society and Generations,” 162–63.

<sup>98</sup> Duk-ryul Hong, “Korean Society and Generations,” 164.

<sup>99</sup> Duk-ryul Hong, “Korean Society and Generations,” 163.

## 2. Transition/386 Generation (Age: 51–60)

The Transition/386 Generation was born between 1960–1969. The people from the Transition/386 Generation experienced their formative years (age 15–25) between 1975–1994 and are mostly in their 50s in current South Korean society.

Transition/386 Generation grew up in a heavily controlled society under the dictatorship of President Park Chung-hee and bloody suppression under President Chun Doo-hwan. As they were growing up, people from the Transition/386 Generation pondered the discrepancies between what they were taught in the school about democracy and social liberty, and what the reality showed on the Cold War ideology and heavily controlled society under the authoritarian military government. This generation has questioned and acted on the social issues stemming from a lack of liberal democracy and human rights under the authoritarian society in the 1970s and 80s. Also, the Transition/386 Generation started to look for an alternative solution to the social problems from the officially banned texts of Marx and Lenin, resisting the “ideologically correct” answers that were mandated by the government.<sup>100</sup>

Also, directly challenging the black-and-white dichotomy of the national identity (i.e., anti-communism, anti-North Korea and pro-American), the Transition/386 Generation started to view the United States as an obstacle and imperialistic intruders, who support the dictatorships for its own national interest in East Asia and interrupts the reconciliation with North Korea.<sup>101</sup> In sum, the Transition/386 Generation has a strong tendency toward progressive political opposition to the traditional conservatives, represented by the War Generation. In this political stance, this generation shows strong support for unorthodox alternatives to building an ideal South Korean society from the post-materialistic, post-ideological values—including from once-banned socialism and by peacefully engaging with North Korea.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Andrei Lankov, “Fiasco of 386 Generation,” *The Korea Times*, February 5, 2008, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/special/2008/04/180\\_18529.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/special/2008/04/180_18529.html).

<sup>101</sup> Duk-ryul Hong, “Korean Society and Generations,” 172–73.

<sup>102</sup> Duk-ryul Hong, “Korean Society and Generations,” 172–74.

*a. Historical Events and Unique Social Experiences*

(1) Improved Economic Stability

From the hard work and sacrifice of its parents' generation, the Transition/386 Generation was benefited from a more stable and improved economic situation. As shown in Figure 3, the South Korean GDPs per capita grew exponentially during their formative years. With a high annual GDP growth, nearly all sectors of ROK society could enjoy an improved lifestyle. It was the beginning of the developmental state industrialization, which is often acclaimed by its coined-phrase, "the miracle of the Han river." In this period of rapid growth and modernization, a large portion of the Transition/386 Generation could start its youth years in the middle-class status. They no longer had to worry about their physical necessity and started to look for post-materialistic values in society. Their main question was the issues of an authoritarian society. Eventually, as an educated college student in the 1980s, the Transition/386 Generation could no longer validate the previous generation's justification that restricted democracy, violent oppression, and compromised civil liberty are necessary to overcome poverty.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Andrei Lankov, "Understanding S. Korea's '386 generation' and pro-north activists."

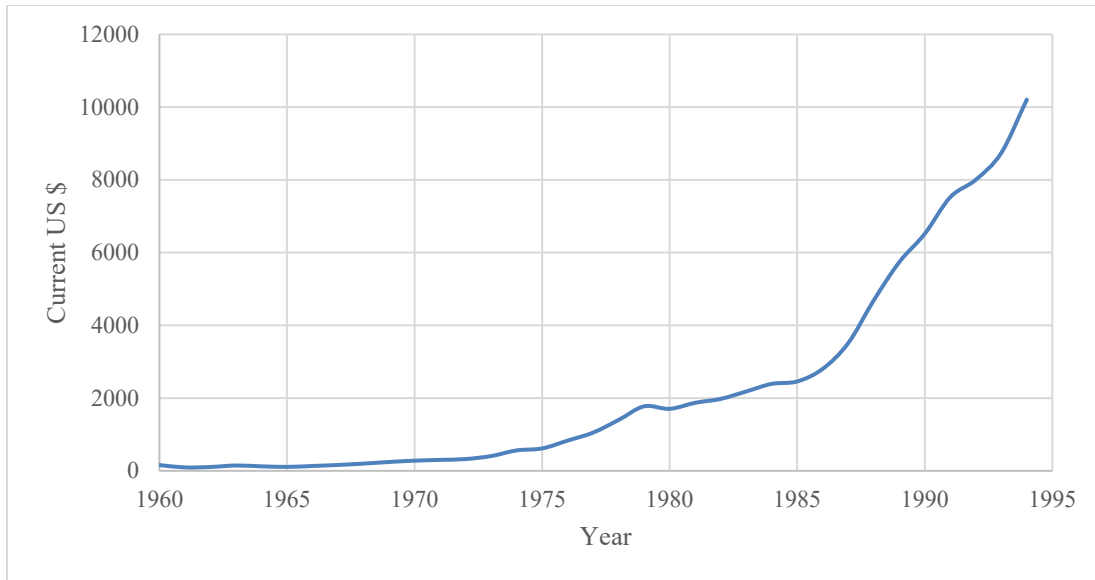


Figure 3. South Korean GDP per Capita (1960–1994) in Current U.S. Dollar<sup>104</sup>

Also, improved economic stability brought the flourishing of popular culture in this generation. Introduction of the professional sports industry, broadcasting in color televisions, folk music scenes, and café culture created a unique cohort experience of the Transition/386 Generation.<sup>105</sup> The Korean popular culture was largely influenced by liberal Western culture, and by adopting the Western culture, young people in the 1970s and 1980s started to admire the free and liberal society of the United States and Western Europe. Along with this free- and liberal-seeking popular culture, 1982 government policy to lift 36-years-old nationwide curfew synergized to create a liberal consumeristic society in South Korea.<sup>106</sup> The beginning of consumeristic society differentiates one major characteristic distinction between the Transition/386 Generation and the previous War

<sup>104</sup>Source: “GDP per capita (current US\$) – Korea, Rep.,” World Bank, accessed February 21, 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?end=1995&locations=KR&start=1960&view=chart>.

<sup>105</sup> Won Kim, “Desire to go beyond the taboo of Park Jung-hee’s Restoration-Youth and Pop Culture in the 1970s,” *Kyunghyang News*, October, 25, 2013, [http://news.khan.co.kr/kh\\_news/khan\\_art\\_view.html?art\\_id=201310251725001](http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?art_id=201310251725001).

<sup>106</sup> Tracy Dahl, “S. Koreans Enjoy Nights Without Curfew,” *The Washington Post*, January 18, 1982, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1982/01/18/s-koreans-enjoy-nights-without-curfew/d7ff2e94-fc38-4cb0-97ca-bebde93b2/>.

Generation. In the 1980s, the younger generation's spending habits and popular culture were often widely criticized by the War Generation as flamboyant and sinful decadence.<sup>107</sup> However, it was the free and liberal values imported along with the popular culture that fueled this generation to fight against authoritarianism and brought democracy in South Korea.

## (2) Student Activists

The Transition/386 Generation is famous for its student activist experience during its college years. Even its name, three-eight-six, highlights that this generation is comprised of people who were born in the sixties (1960s) and attended college in the eighties (1980s). Before the 1980s, South Koreans could not easily access a college education. As shown in Figure 4, the percentage of the population enrolled in tertiary education was below 10% until 1979, and beginning from the 1980s, the number of enrollment started to increase exponentially. Through a series of education system reforms that were conducted in the 1970s and 1980s, such as 1981 elimination of college entrance quota, that provided easier access to the Transition/386 Generation for the college education. With increased college enrollment numbers in the 1980s, student activism became more popular and organized. As a student, people from the Transition/386 Generation experienced 5.18 Uprising and June Uprising, and learn about the hidden social issues like rural-urban inequality, worker's condition, and the state's suppression of democracy.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Won Kim, "Desire to go beyond the taboo of Park Jung-hee's Restoration-Youth and Pop Culture in the 1970s."

<sup>108</sup> Duk-ryul Hong, "Korean Society and Generations," 172.

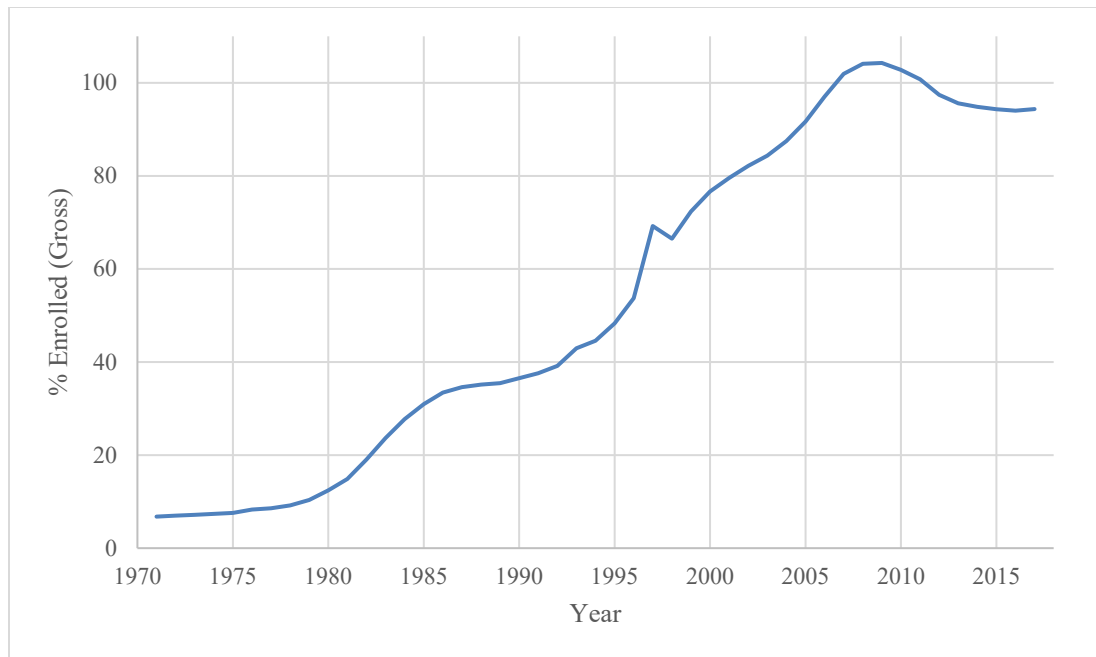


Figure 4. Tertiary School Enrollment in South Korea<sup>109</sup>

Ironically, the Transition/386 Generation's longing for democracy and overcoming the authoritarianism brought radicalization in their ideology. The act of student remonstrance of government's misdeeds is a long historical Korean culture from the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1897) and even lasted during the colonial period. However, the military authoritarian government under President Park and Chun did not allow to air the grievance.<sup>110</sup> Thus, students radicalized and created underground organizations to continued their fight against the government. This radicalization brought students seeking alternatives to current political and economic systems from banned texts from outside—such as Marxism, Leninism, and even *Juche* ideology from North Korea.<sup>111</sup> It was the

<sup>109</sup> “Gross enrollment ratio for tertiary school is calculated by dividing the number of students enrolled in tertiary education regardless of age by the population of the age group which officially corresponds to tertiary education (5-year age group starting from the official secondary school graduation age), and multiplying by 100.” Source: “School enrollment (% gross) – Korea, Rep.,” World Bank, accessed January 09, 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR?end=2017&locations=KR&start=1971>; UNESCO, “Gross Enrolment Ratio,” *Institute of Statistics*, accessed February 21, 2020, <http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/gross-enrolment-ratio>.

<sup>110</sup> Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 222.

<sup>111</sup> Andrei Lankov, “Fiasco of 386 Generation.”



formation of another form of Korean nationalism that rose from this environment. Korean society had a long tradition of holding *Sadae* (사대) ideology, which means that Korea, a small power nation, should serve other major power nation to maintain peace and order. The Korean nationalists saw deep-rooted *Sadae* as the biggest obstacle to create independent Korea. The nationalists first criticized elites and government officials of Joseon for being *Sadae*. Then they criticized Japanese collaborators during the colonial periods and later the pro-American conservatives once the ROK was formed. To the left-wing nationalist's perspective, the pro-Americanism is another form of *Sadae*, and North Korean *Juche* ideologies are the true independent-minded nationalistic solution.<sup>112</sup> Many student activists were convinced by the nationalist's argument, which largely influenced the left-leaning, pro-North Korea, anti-American values of the Transition/386 Generation. This anti-Americanism developed during this era can be exemplified by the series of firebombing incidents between 1980–1983 on the American Cultural Centers at numerous South Korean cities as a demonstration demanding an apology and stop occupying South Korea with the U.S. military.<sup>113</sup>

### (3) Democratization

The dictatorship in ROK was formalized by *Yushin*, or a “revitalization,” Constitution Reform of 1972. During this period, President Park Chung-hee had faced both increasing discontents from domestic politics and decreased U.S. interest in providing security to ROK due to the Détente policy. To secure his presidency and empowers himself even more from foreign and domestic oppositions, President Park declares Martial Law in 1972 and dissolved the National Assembly—followed by writing a new national constitution.<sup>114</sup> As a result, President Park took full control of the state and society. The Transition/386 Generation started their formative years in this environment. What they can remember from their birth is strictly controlled society and fear of political violence. As

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<sup>112</sup> Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 222.

<sup>113</sup> Susan Chira, “60 Students in Seoul Occupy U.S. Offices,” *New York Times*, May 24, 1985, <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/05/24/world/60-students-in-seoul-occupy-us-office.html>.

<sup>114</sup> Michael Robinson, *Korea's Twentieth-Century Odyssey*, 136.

they grew up, they experienced Park Chung-hee's assassination and another military coup in 1979 by General Chun Doo-hwan, who later became another dictator-president. The democracy in South Korea even further receded with him in power.<sup>115</sup>

However, with increased domestic and international pressure to democracy, ROK shifted from military dictatorship to democracy in 1987. Domestically, increasing demand of the middle class and student activists continued to escalate. Internationally, the United States and international community had a closer eye on the human rights violation and misdeeds of the authoritarian regime—especially with ROK hosting the 1988 Olympics. In June 1987, a nationwide democratic demonstration grew to an uncontrollable level, which was initially sparked by a death of a student under police interrogation, and later they started to demand a direct presidential election, end of censorship, releasing political prisoners, and removing the obstacles to political activities.<sup>116</sup> With no other possible options other than another violent crackdown of demonstrators—which the United States strongly opposed, President Chun accepted the people's demand. The presidential election of 1987 opened up a new era of democracy in South Korea, with a peaceful transfer of power and freely contested race among the Presidential candidates. The Transition/386 Generation is the generation that experienced the authoritarian military dictatorship, fought for democracy, and tasted the first fruit of democratization. Yet, it was not until 1998 when the first progressive president was elected, and left-progressive political agendas were implemented. Thus, this generation is the “transition” generation who experienced the transition from the authoritarian era to the democratic era.

#### ***b. Generational Characteristics***

Analyzing the historical events, the generational characteristics of the Transition/386 Generation can be identified as four major categories based on its unique experiences. Table 4 shows the analyzed cohort effects caused by social environment and cohort experiences.

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<sup>115</sup> Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 211.

<sup>116</sup> Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 213–14.

Table 4. Generational Characteristics of the Transition/386 Generation

Key Cohort Environment	Key Cohort Experience	Event Year	Cohort Effects
Park Chung-hee Administration (Authoritarian)		1963-1979	(1) Anti-Authoritarianism (2) Seeking Autonomy (2) Underground Movement
	12.12. Coup	1979	(1) Anti-Authoritarianism (1) Anti-American
Chun Doo-hwan Administration (Authoritarian)		1980-1987	(1) Suppression/Violence (2) Left-wing Nationalism (2) Underground Movement
	5.18 Uprising	1980	(1) Anti-Authoritarianism (1) Anti-American
	First Color TV Program Broadcasted	1980	(3) Popular Culture/Consumerism (3) Adopting Free/Liberal Culture
	Firebombing of American Cultural Center (Gwangju, Busan, Daegu)	1980-1983	(1) Anti-American
	College Entrance Reform	1981	(4) Increased Student Activism
	Established Professional Baseball League	1982	(3) Popular Culture/Consumerism
	Lift of Nationwide Curfew	1982	(3) Popular Culture/Consumerism (4) Increased Student Activism
	June Uprising	1987	(4) Democratization (4) Improvement Mentality

Note: (1) through (4) indicate four categories of the generational characteristic

The first category (1) of the generational characteristic of the Transition/386 Generation is its strong tendency towards anti-authoritarian, anti-American, and pro-North Korean values. These are the complete opposite of the War Generation's characteristics, as the Transition/386 Generation retained its characteristics while resisting the social values bestowed by its previous generation. These values are consolidated as the left-progressive agenda of South Korean politics.

The second category (2) of the Transition/386 generational characteristic is the strong nationalism for self-help. This characteristic is expressed in two ways: first is its tendency to seek autonomy in their policy and decisions by breaking ties in the traditional U.S.-ROK interdependence, and second is its tendency of accommodating North Korea, as

exemplified by the sunshine policy—a peaceful economic and cultural engagement to gradually bring North Korea towards the reformation and reconciliation. Until 1987, South Korea had been receiving a significant amount of U.S. military assistance and aids to ensure its security and economic growth.<sup>117</sup> These client-patron relationship has brought South Korean leaders to cooperate to U.S. foreign policies and U.S. political pressures. This is well illustrated by President Park’s decision to commit ROK military deployment to Vietnam, which the progressives viewed as authoritarian conservatives are sacrificing Korean soldiers for U.S. imperialistic ambition. Also, progressives looked at North Korea (to be exact, propagandas of North Korea) in contrast to the South, that it thoroughly purged the Japanese collaborators and maintained an independent course from Beijing and Moscow.<sup>118</sup> Therefore, student activists were attracted to North Korea and turning away from South Korean conservatives, and this generational characteristics of rejecting *Sadae* to major power, holding autonomy, and anti-Americanism became the banner of the Transition/386 Generation.

The third category (3) of the generational characteristic is the emergence of popular cultures and consumeristic society. This generational characteristic was based on their cohort experience of the growing economy and liberalization of society. Unlike the War Generation, people from the Transition/386 Generation have not seen the extreme poverty and aftermaths of the Korean War. They were the first group to nourish the effects of industrialization and modernization, which began in the 1970s. As college students, they could roam freely after the curfew hours, and they could listen to foreign music and wear jeans as a fashion item. Thus, the Transition/386 Generation holds both political liberalism as well as cultural liberalism and adaptability.

The fourth category (4) of the generational characteristic is admiration for an egalitarian democratic society and its improvement mentality. The Transition/386 Generation has experienced the June Uprising of 1987 and obtained democracy as a prize of victory against the military dictatorship. This experience of a victory laid the

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<sup>117</sup> Scott Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads*, 26–28.

<sup>118</sup> Chaibong Hahm, “The Two South Koreas: A House Divided,” 62.

improvement mentality among this generation that people from Transition/386 Generation have a strong will and courage to challenge whatever they see as irrational and has room for improvement. This mentality gave the Transitional/386 Generation a high participation rate on political matters and social issues and made them as a powerful political generation that has a massive influence.

### **3. Democratic Generation (Age: 40–50)**

The Democratic Generation was born between 1970–1980. The people from the Democratic Generation experienced their formative years (age 15–25) between 1985–2005 and are mostly in their 40s in current South Korean society.

It was 1989, Berlin Wall came down, and two Germanys reunified soon after. The young youths from the Democratic Generation saw this historical event over on color television and became optimistic about the reunification of their own nation. This anecdote well summarizes the historical environment of the Democratic Generation.

The people from the Democratic Generation grew up experiencing the post-Cold War tranquility and all the positive atmospheres from the victory of liberalism. North Korean and South Korean high-level delegations signed an agreement that confirms that the two Koreas have a common goal of peaceful reconciliation—signifying the ease of 40-years of hostile tension between two archenemies. The economic development which started from the export-led industrialization and dual-track policy under President Park reached its peak during the 1990s, and the South Korean economy completed its transformation from light-industry to heavy-industry and hi-tech industry. Automobiles, consumer appliances, personal computers, and communications devices were widely spread to the public, and South Koreans could freely travel to other nations without restrictions. It was an era of globalization and liberalization, and there was no more state suppression that threatened people's life. The Democratic Generation spent their youth in this post-ideology, post-authoritarian, and individualistic society.

Also, one of the biggest distinctions of the Democratic Generation from older generations is that this generation no longer has the “third-world complex,” as people from the Democratic Generation now see South Korea as a developed economy and a

modernized society.<sup>119</sup> This generation built a strong national pride as growing up, and with ROK's improved global status, the Democratic Generation wants more independence and autonomy away from foreign influences—mainly from the United States. Student activism also continued in the 1990s by the Democratic Generation, but instead of fighting against the authoritarian suppression for democracy, students voiced social issues like labor conditions, social benefits, and reforms based on left-progressive values. Simply put, the Democratic Generation succeeded many of the Transition/386 Generation's characteristics, in a more globalized and liberalized environment.

*a. Historical Events and Unique Social Experiences*

(1) Perfecting Liberal Democracy

In 1987, when the Democratic Generation had just started to enter its formative years, the successful June Uprising sentenced the termination to the long-lasting military authoritarian regime in South Korea. With the free and fair democratic voting process, the people of South Korea elected their president under the mood of an optimistic democratization process. President Roh Tae-woo, a key member under the previous military regime and a good friend of President Chun, won a close election against split opposition between Kim Dae-jung and Kim Young-sam.<sup>120</sup> The five-year term under President Roh Tae-woo was a period of transition from an authoritarian state to liberal democracy. He accepted many restraints on his authority in order to create a more democratic political order, including giving back independence to ROK's judiciary branch.<sup>121</sup> However, a more consolidated liberal democracy that ROK has today did not come in overnight. It was not until President Kim Young-sam that put the military under the civilian control and cut the close ties between government and *chaebols*, the family-owned conglomerate businesses.

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<sup>119</sup> Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 220.

<sup>120</sup> Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 214.

<sup>121</sup> Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 214.

Also, there was high student activism and radical labor movements under President Roh's period—which often clashed in a violent manner. Yet, the student activists from the Democratic Generation had a demand drastically different in ideological value compared to their predecessors' demand, as they witnessed the defeat of communism with the end of the Cold War. In other words, neither anti- nor pro-communism were as strong as they had been for earlier generations since communism was no longer a real worldwide issue. Thus, social movements and protests during this time have moved on from the ideological conflict to more focused on creating better labor conditions and earning higher wages. In general, student activists from the Democratic Generation had public support and understanding since people from the older generations had a sentimental connection with student protesters as themselves have once participated in the student demonstration against dictatorship and authoritarianism in the past.<sup>122</sup>

## (2) Political/Economic Superiority over North Korea

One unique environment under the President Roh administration was its diplomatic successes with former communist countries and achieving political/economic superiority over the North Korean regime. The Democratic Generation has grown up in a post-ideological environment, where no more “fabricated” hostility against communism and North Korea is required to justify regime stability and legitimacy. Compared to North Korea, South Korea in the late 1980s and 1990s had achieved democratic stability, a stronger economy, and better foreign relationship with the rest of the world, even including China and the Soviet Union (Russia after 1991).<sup>123</sup> With this superior mentality, South Koreans could now approach North Korea with a more embracing and tolerant stance, which led to a more peaceful and cooperative atmosphere with North Korea. In 1991, Premiers from two Koreas had signed an Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-Aggression, and Exchanges and Cooperation, which created a roadmap towards reunification in the

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<sup>122</sup> Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 222.

<sup>123</sup> Scott Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads*, 56.

post-Cold War era.<sup>124</sup> Although there were several incidents in this era that brought back sudden hostile tension between the two Koreas, more South Koreans started to believe that North Korea could not impose a serious security threat to South Korea. South Korean people in the 1990s were getting mundane to repeated North Korean threats and having more interest in other global matters and the well-being of their lives. Also, South Koreans started to believe that peaceful negotiation and mutual trust are a more probable way to reconciliation.

In this mood of reconciliation, the North Korean nuclear and missile program became the hot issue in 1993 after North Korea announced its intent to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Treaty (NPT). The United States started a direct negotiation with North Korea as a response to the threat, which was an unprecedented diplomatic gesture as well as an undermining move that created discontent in the relationship with ROK.<sup>125</sup> ROK President Kim Young-sam clearly communicated his concerns over the multiple channels, which were 1) South Korea should also be part of negotiation, since North Korea issue is the issue of Koreans, 2) The new progressive U.S. administration (under President Clinton) is being naïve and does not understand the sly North Korean tactics, and 3) The U.S.-North Korea bilateral negotiation could potentially weaken the U.S. commitment in the U.S.-ROK alliance and security of South Korea.<sup>126</sup> Consequently, the South Korean public heard these concerns over the media and became unhappy towards the United States' decision. It was a mixed feeling from the South Korean public that they want more autonomy and independence away from the United States, but at the same time, they need a security guarantee from the United States.

### (3) Rise of National Status

To the Democratic Generation, South Korea is no longer an under-developed country that relies on the nurture and protection of the United States, but a responsible

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<sup>124</sup> Paul Blustein, "Two Koreas Pledge to End Aggression," *The Washington Post*, December 13, 1991, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/12/13/two-koreas-pledge-to-end-aggression/d104ab96-1a85-4024-8b61-bf9e43d779eb/>.

<sup>125</sup> Scott Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads*, 73–78.

<sup>126</sup> Scott Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads*, 74.



shoulder-to-shoulder partner for world peace and global prosperity. 1988 Seoul Olympic was a significant cohort event that it was one of the first major global events that were hosted in ROK. Through the successful hosting of the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul, South Korea showcased its enhanced capability and level of development to the world. Also, it was an Olympic that both the communist and free-liberal bloc nations participated altogether.<sup>127</sup> South Korea used this opportunity to boast its stability, development, and industrial achievements to visiting officials and foreigners. As a result, many eastern communist bloc nations established relations with South Korea after this event, which further isolated North Korea, as well as opening up the global market for South Korean manufactured goods.<sup>128</sup>

Also, the proclamation of the “New Diplomacy” under President Kim Young-sam, South Korea created a new social environment by implementing government policies and educating citizens on *segzehwa* (globalization).<sup>129</sup> Also, in 1989, the ROK government officially lifted the ban on foreign travel, which allowed many students to go abroad and experience other cultures. These new environments changed the young South Korean’s perspective on viewing the world from a parochial point-of-view to more international-minded.<sup>130</sup> The Democratic Generation became more aware of global issues like global peace and regional security, environmental protection, and international trade and development.

#### **b. Generational Characteristics**

Analyzing the historical events, the generational characteristics of the Democratic Generation can be identified as three major categories based on its unique experiences.

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<sup>127</sup> Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 215.

<sup>128</sup> Scott Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads*, 53–56.

<sup>129</sup> Scott Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads*, 78.

<sup>130</sup> Foreign travel was partially authorized in 1983 with strict conditions and requirements. The open foreign travel was authorized in 1989, and total number of travelers on the first-year recorded more than million people. People in their 20s were the age group with the biggest increase in number who went to foreign travel in the following year (1990). Jung-mi Kim, “Liberalization of Foreign Travel (해외여행 자유화),” National Archives of Korea, accessed January, 13, 2020, <http://theme.archives.go.kr/next/koreaOfRecord/globalTravel.do>; Scott Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads*, 78.

Table 5 shows the analyzed cohort effects caused by social environment and cohort experiences.

Table 5. Generational Characteristics of the Democratic Generation

Key Cohort Environment	Key Cohort Experience	Event Year	Cohort Effects
Roh Tae-woo Administration (Democracy-Conservative)		1987-1993	(2) Ideological Superiority (2) Economic Superiority (3) Continued Student Activists
	Peaceful Transition of Power	1987	(2) National Pride
	Seoul Summer Olympics	1988	(2) National Pride (1) Globalization/Liberalization
	Fall of Berlin Wall	1989	(1) End of the Cold War (2) Reunification
	Liberalization of Foreign Travel	1989	(1) Globalization/Liberalization
	Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-Aggression, and Exchanges and Cooperation	1991	(2) Pro-North Korea
Kim Young-sam Administration (Democracy-Conservative)		1993-1998	(3) Liberalization (Reforms) (1) Civilian Government
	Agreed Framework	1994	(2) Pro-North Korea (2) Anti-American

Note: (1) through (3) indicate two categories of the generational characteristic

The first category (1) of the generational characteristic of the Democratic Generation is its post-ideological mindset. The end of the Cold War brought the new chapter in world history. Broadly, this event put an end to ideological conflict and transition from bipolar power world order to a new unipolar power world order. Narrowly, this event created an ideological gap between South Korean generations, one who experienced the Cold War security environment, and one who has not. For the younger generation who has grown up in the post-Cold War security environment, politics of the black and white dichotomy is no longer valid and justified. Rather, individuality and pluralism were largely accepted from the new world view of globalization and liberalization. Also, from achieving rapid development, many South Koreans wanted to be a more responsible member of the

world community, especially transitioned from aid-receiving to aid-giving nation.<sup>131</sup> Thus, the Democratic Generation shows more open and embrative perspectives to different ideas, including once tabooed socialism and truth about North Korea, while not hiding criticism towards the misdeeds of older generations. This tendency puts the Democratic Generation on the side of the progressive left, stands against the privileged class who established its power through abiding by the Cold War authoritarian order.

The second category (2) of the Democratic Generation's characteristic is its strong national pride from ROK's improved situation. Entering the final decade of the millennium, South Korea became a rich democracy. By the mid-1990s, ROK achieved a total GDP of \$500 billion, and GDP per capita of \$10,000.<sup>132</sup> Another example of showing the development of South Korea and the emergence of consumeristic society is by counting the number of registered automobiles. As shown in Figure 5, the number of registered automobiles in Seoul remained low (less than 200,000) until the early 1980s but started to exponentially increase from 1985 (half million in 1985 to two million in 1995).

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<sup>131</sup> Axel Marx and Jadir Soares, "South Korea's Transition from Recipient to DAC Donor: Assessing Korea's Development Cooperation Policy," *International Development* 4, no.2 (2013), 107–142.

<sup>132</sup> "GDP (current US\$) – Korea, Rep.," World Bank, accessed January 09, 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=KR>; "GDP per capita (current US\$) – Korea, Rep.,"

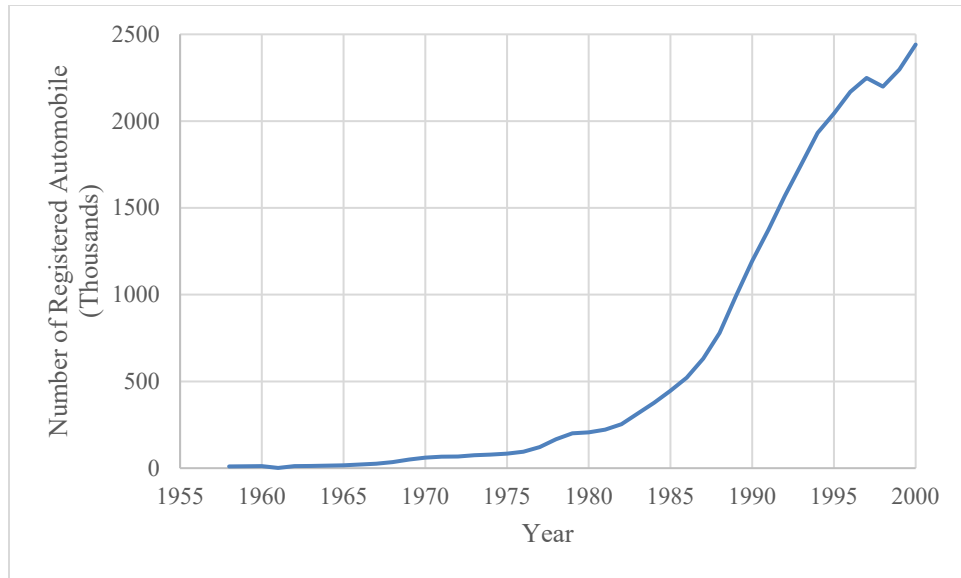


Figure 5. Number of Registered Automobiles in Seoul<sup>133</sup>

Also, South Korea has a rank-conscious culture that people are constantly comparing their status and performance with those of the others.<sup>134</sup> Thus, it was natural to develop a strong national pride as South Koreans learn about the situation in other parts of the world—not many nations can come par with the achievements of South Korea. From this nationalism, young South Koreans from the Democratic Generation demanded equal and fair status in the world. Also, they demanded independence from foreign pressure and interferences and developed hatred towards Japanese and Americans as they were imaged as the imperialistic invaders.

The third category (3) of the generational characteristic is the Democratic Generation's interest in social problems from accelerated development, especially the treatment on losers of the economic system. Unlike previous generations, the main target of the student activists was not the regime or dictatorship. The main target was rising social inequality and unfairness. During industrialization, South Korean society had nourished a relatively egalitarian growth shared among all levels of society. However, by the late 1980s,

<sup>133</sup> Adapted from “Number of Registered Automobile,” The Seoul Institute, accessed January 14, 2020, <http://data.si.re.kr/node/389>.

<sup>134</sup> Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 220.

abusive power and social privileges of extremely wealthy class (*chaebols*) became the issue. It was seen as the division and solidification of new class structure based on region and family occupation, where the vertical social movement becomes less attainable as the social class became more as a hereditary determination.<sup>135</sup> People from the Democratic Generation became frustrated by this rising social issue, as they experienced noticeable glass ceilings and unfair treatment from the society as they entered the workforce in the 1990s. Therefore, the Democratic Generation started to reject the social hierarchy and order that were created by the authoritarian generations. Also, this generation began to adopt “anti-authoritarianism,” which shares the same terminology as Transitional/386 Generation’s generational characteristic, but it has a different meaning: it is not against the authoritarian regime itself, but all the systematic faults and social residue from the authoritarian order. In sum, the Democratic Generation seems to have more progressive tendencies than the Transition/386 Generation, as they are younger than 386-ers—less aging effect—and not as fortunate to nourish all the positive outcomes of earlier periods (i.e., equal growths, shared national interest with the United States, and less public division due to common enemy—North Korea).

#### **4. New Generation (Age: 20–39)**

The New Generation is the youngest political generation in South Korea, referring to the people currently in their 20s and 30s. They started experiencing their formative years (ages 15–25) in 1996, and the youngest members of this generation haven’t yet turned 25.

There are many studies that further divide this generation into several different generational groups within, but this thesis uses a single generational classification to combine all young South Koreans born after 1981. This is because there is not yet a single impactful cohort experience that has happened after the IMF crisis of 1997, that politically (which affects one’s security perception) divides this group further. Asian Financial Crisis (AFC), more widely known as the IMF crisis to the Koreans, drastically changed the

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<sup>135</sup> Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 219.

perception and lifestyle of South Koreans.<sup>136</sup> Although the national economy eventually recovered from the recession, the experience and reforms that the IMF crisis brought to Korean society left a long-lasting mark.

South Koreans in the New Generation often blame the older generations for creating such a hard, unfair, unjust, and hopeless situation for them. They often refer to the current disillusioned society as a “Hell Joseon (헬조선).”<sup>137</sup> These young South Koreans saw their parents got forcibly lose their jobs and business during the IMF crisis, families broken apart, and in some cases, lose lives. It was a destructive social event that they experienced during their formative years, and later impacting their life again as they became a working age. As grown-ups, they faced a slow economy with a high unemployment rate. Also, the New Generation saw the children of high-ranking officials and rich families, kids born with “the golden-spoon,” effortlessly took jobs and social status using their family background.<sup>138</sup> It was social injustice and unfairness that this generation distressed the most, and it became the reason why they show more interest in politics, to fight the existing politics.

Growing up in this unfavorable domestic environment, the people of the New Generation see North Korea as just another annoying neighboring country that makes their life no easier. They no longer see the North Koreans as families, and even feel less tied to than non-Korean ethnic foreign workers living in South Korea.<sup>139</sup> Unlike the previous generations who felt the strong need for reunification, the New Generation is much less enthusiastic about it since they see more harm than good by pursuing it. Also, experiencing the era of reconciliation and peace talks held by the two consecutive progressive ROK administrations of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moon-hyun, the New Generation saw that the North Korean regime had not changed a bit and it even built the nuclear weapon to solidify

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<sup>136</sup> Steven Denney, “Number of Irregular Workers Continue to Rise in South Korea.”

<sup>137</sup> Se-Woong Koo, “Korea, Thy Name is Hell Joseon,” *Korea Expose*, September 22, 2015, <https://www.koreaexpose.com/korea-thy-name-is-hell-joseon/>.

<sup>138</sup> Se-Woong Koo, “Korea, Thy Name is Hell Joseon.”

<sup>139</sup> Clint Work, “What Do Younger South Koreans Think of North Korea?,” *The Diplomat*, February 02, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/02/what-do-younger-south-koreans-think-of-north-korea/>.

its hostility towards South Korea. To the New Generation, North Korea is another example of an unjust, irrational, untrustworthy member of the society that these young South Koreans abhor the most from the domestic experience. Thus, unlike the Transition/386 and Democratic generations, the New Generation shares a negative perception towards North Korea.

*a. Historical Events and Unique Social Experiences*

(1) 1997 Asian Financial Crisis – The IMF Crisis

Before the IMF crisis, South Korea enjoyed an unusually good economy and growth rate. From this high growth rate, the South Korean economy and consumer market were very promising and optimistic, which led companies to hire more workers to meet the market demand. Thus, the unemployment rate was kept low, and a low unemployment rate and high savings rate helped a relatively fair economic equality in South Korea. However, the economic decline during and after the IMF crisis brought many reforms that changed the South Korean society.

One exemplary case of this reform is the workforce restructuring. Before the IMF crisis, South Koreans regarded their workplace as an “iron rice bowl,” which provides lifetime employment as well as a retirement pension. However, these social benefits were too costly to maintain for a long time, especially after the economic crisis. The original intention of the workforce reform was to make a more flexible workforce and nimble business environment, but it also created a social problem of irregular workers.<sup>140</sup> Irregular workers, unlike traditional regular workers, are paid less and not guaranteed the four major insurances: health insurance, occupational hazard insurance, unemployment insurance, and the national pension, as well as no labor union protection.<sup>141</sup> Businesses started to reduce the number of regular workers and filled the rest with irregular workers to gain flexibility and agility in the volatile economy. Unintentionally, this reform created a favorable condition for *chaebols*, providing them a dominant position, *kap*, to control its employees

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<sup>140</sup> Steven Denney, “Number of Irregular Workers Continue to Rise in South Korea.”

<sup>141</sup> Steven Denney, “Number of Irregular Workers Continue to Rise in South Korea.”

using this new relationship between the business and workers. As the top 30 conglomerate groups (*chaebols*) in South Korea started controlled more than 40% of the ROK economy in the 2000s, the political and economic power they wield in the society became more powerful.<sup>142</sup> In sum, the reforms based on the neo-liberalism has helped the South Korean economy to recover from the IMF crisis, but it also brought its structural limitation of rising inequality.

## (2) Strong Korea

People in the New Generation, the 20s and 30s in the current South Korean society, have strong confidence and pride in ROK. From what they can remember, these young generations only saw that their nation as a strong and competitive nation, and it is no longer inferior compared to other world powers—such as the United States or Japan.<sup>143</sup> They witnessed the successful performance of the national soccer team in the 2002 FIFA World Cup, which took place in South Korea, and the rise of global leading South Korean industries such as Samsung and Hyundai. Also, this generation's confidence was highly raised as the young people successfully participated in a series of peaceful demonstrations, often referred to as the candlelight vigils, in 2002, 2004, and 2008. This version of public demonstration is largely different from the older generation's version, where there was violence, Molotov cocktails, tear gas, yelling, and even casualties.<sup>144</sup> Younger generations believe that South Korean society has now transitioned from a barbarous and immature society to a matured and fully democratized society where people can freely voice their opinions and concerns.<sup>145</sup>

With this new identity of Strong Korea, the New Generation grew up with more sensitive feelings toward sovereignty and autonomy of its nation than previous generations. It was from inevitable identity change that came from the aforementioned economic

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<sup>142</sup> Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 285.

<sup>143</sup> Sun-Young Park, "Shinsedae: Conservative Attitudes of a 'New Generation' in South Korea and the Impact on the Korean Presidential Election," *EWC Insights* 2:1 (September 2007), 2.

<sup>144</sup> Sun-chul Kim, "South Korea's candlelight protests," *East Asia Forum*, February 7, 2017, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2017/02/07/south-koreas-candlelight-protests/>.

<sup>145</sup> Sun-chul Kim, "South Korea's candlelight protests."



changes, but also from the domestic political change. After the Kim Young-sam administration, South Korea has elected its first progressive administration of Kim Dae-jung, succeeded by another progressive government under Roh Moo-hyun. It was 10-years of the liberal progressive governments from 1998 to 2008. Behind this political change, there was an emergence of the Transition/386 Generation into the South Korean political domain. In their 30s and 40s, the progressive-minded 386-ers rose to the new political power. Under this new progressive wave of demanding autonomy, South Korea started to move away from the traditional patron-client relations with the United States, which had imposed heavy economic and diplomatic influence of the United States. As a capable and independent state, South Korea wanted to revise the relationship with the United States, demanding more respect for its autonomy and setting its own foreign policies.<sup>146</sup>

The New Generation has grown up in the era of this relationship transition, which affected the young people's perspective on the U.S.-ROK relations and the role of United States Forces in Korea (USFK). There were escalations of events in the early 2000s on the anti-Americanism in South Korea regarding the unfair terms of SOFA, such as a case of a U.S. soldier murdering South Korean citizen, contamination of USAF bombing range in Maehyang-ri, and USFK releasing formaldehyde into the Han river.<sup>147</sup> Also, the Bush Administration's hard stance against North Korea concerned many South Koreans about the possibility of the second Korean War.<sup>148</sup> Finally, the public resentment on their unfair relation burst out in 2002 when U.S. Army truck struck and killed two schoolgirls in Korea—and the United States government refused the ROK's request to conduct the trial of two U.S. soldiers on Korean court. This accident was publicized immediately after the 2002 FIFA World Cup, and many passionate South Korean citizens came out to the same place where they cheered for their national team during the World Cup games to rally against the United States. The people from the New Generation have either participated in

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<sup>146</sup> Scott Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads*, 114.

<sup>147</sup> Uk Heo and Terence Roehrig, *The Evolution of the South Korea-United States Alliance* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 114–15.

<sup>148</sup> Barbara Demick, "50,000 in South Korea Protest U.S. Policies," *Los Angeles Times*, June 14, 2003, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2003-jun-14-fg-korea14-story.html>.

this anti-American rally or seen it through the internet media, which made them think about whether they should continue or revise the current U.S.-ROK alliance relationship.

The North Korea threat and provocations in the era of reconciliation were another notable experience of the New Generation. Through two consecutive progressive governments under Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, ROK's North Korean policy radically has shifted from the previous conservative regimes who utilized the containment strategy. This new engagement policy created the mood of reconciliation and peace talks. In non-government levels, inter-Korean personnel and trade exchange started to increase, Kaesong Industrial Complex was initiated, and many more humanitarian aids were provided to North Korea as part of this progressive policy. However, the reconciliatory policy created two negative impacts on the New Generation. First, despite the South's good-will approach, the North continued its military provocations towards ROK and its nuclear programs. The New Generation had to face untrustworthy and irrational North Korea through the 2002 Battle of *Yeon-pyeong*, a series of missile and nuclear tests, and North Korean torpedo sinking the South Korean Navy warship, *Cheon-an*, in 2010.<sup>149</sup> Second, this engagement policy required a massive flow of money and resources from the South to the North, and South Korean citizens were not happy for being charged for these costs. The South Korean economy slowed down after the 1997 IMF crisis, and people were suffering from the effects of these financial hardships. On top of this, they were burdened with supporting North Koreans, especially solely trusting North Korea's distribution system with very little to none transparency. As time goes, more and more younger generations became distrusting the idea of reconciliation with North Korea and turned hostile towards it.

#### ***b. Generational Characteristics***

Analyzing the historical events, the generational characteristics of the New Generation can be identified as three major categories based on its unique experiences.

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<sup>149</sup> Uk Heo and Terence Roehrig, *The Evolution of the South Korea-United States Alliance*, 276–77.

Table 6 shows the analyzed cohort effects caused by social environment and cohort experiences.

Table 6. Generational Characteristics of the New Generation

Key Cohort Environment	Key Cohort Experience	Event Year	Cohort Effects
	Lift Ban on Japanese Culture	1995	(2) Anti-Nationalism
	Joining OECD	1996	(2) Status of Developed Nation
	IMF Crisis	1997	(1) Economy Crash (1) Economic Reforms
Kim Dae-jung Administration (Democracy-Progressive)		1998-2003	(3) Progressive Government (3) Sunshine Policy (2) Autonomy
	First Public High-Speed Internet Service	1999	(1) (2) (3) Faster Information Sharing
	Battle of Yeon-pyeong	2002	(3) Anti-North Korea
	FIFA World Cup	2002	(2) Status of Developed Nation (Culture of Public Gathering)
	2002 U.S. Army Truck Accident	2002	(2) Anti-American
Roh Moo-hyun Administration (Democracy-Progressive)		2003-2008	(2) Anti-American (2) Autonomy
	First North Korean Nuclear Test	2006	(3) Anti-North Korea
	A moratorium of NK Nuclear Program	2007	(3) Anti-North Korea
Lee Myung-bak Administration (Democracy-Conservative)		2008-2013	(1) Economic Inequality (3) Strengthen the U.S.-ROK alliance
	Second North Korean Nuclear Test	2008	(3) Anti-North Korea
	Global Financial Crisis	2008	(1) Economy Downfall
	Cheon-an Sinking	2010	(3) Anti-North Korea

Note: (1) through (3) indicate three categories of the generational characteristic

The first category (1) of the generational characteristic of the New Generation is people's discontent life in the "Hell-Joseon (Korea)." The term "Hell-Joseon" has quickly become the trend word that symbolizes the life of the young South Koreans in their 20s and 30s. The term is an amalgam of an English word, "Hell," which emphasizes the

hopeless and miserable situation, and “Joseon,” which signifies a return of a traditional feudal society with the hereditary class structure.<sup>150</sup> The “Hell-Joseon” can be explained in two ways: the emergence of a new class structure based on economic and political power, and people’s allergic reaction to the traditional mantras chanted by the older generations, such as “small individual sacrifice for the good of society as a whole” and “failure comes from lack of persevering effort.”<sup>151</sup>

The issue of social class division started to be noticed from the late 1980s. This issue has developed systematically from the ROK’s famous developmental state model of tight coordination between the business, *chaebols*, and government officials. To catch-up to the industrialized nations as a late starter, South Korea under authoritarian regimes widely used government intervention in the market to benefit and nurture its industries—in forms of subsidies, tax benefits, and bending the laws.<sup>152</sup> Also, in order to concentrate the nation’s limited resources and capital, the ROK government deliberately picked winners and losers in the market competition.<sup>153</sup> As time goes, this selection process became more corrupted, and particular *chaebols* and politicians were benefited from the system. This system created some families to be much more successful in South Korean society and became the upper-class status with social privileges.<sup>154</sup> During the era of rapid development, even the common middle-class workers who worked for the *chaebols* could economically be benefitted from the growth. Through attaining higher education and getting accepted to top-level colleges could grant a chance to move up vertically.<sup>155</sup> However, the 1997 IMF crisis has created a malicious effect on South Korean society by worsening the class division through an irregular worker system and unemployment.

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<sup>150</sup> Se-Woong Koo, “Korea, Thy Name is Hell Joseon.”

<sup>151</sup> Se-Woong Koo, “Korea, Thy Name is Hell Joseon.”

<sup>152</sup> Dwight Perkins, *East Asian Development: Foundations and Strategies* (Harvard Press: Cambridge, 2013), 71–73.

<sup>153</sup> Dwight Perkins, *East Asian Development: Foundations and Strategies*, 79–80.

<sup>154</sup> Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 284–86.

<sup>155</sup> Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 284–86.

The Gini coefficient for 1990–1995 was 0.258, which jumped to 0.307 in 2013.<sup>156</sup> Also, based on the 2015 ROK government report, irregular workers only got paid approximately half of what the regular workers were paid.<sup>157</sup> This new social class based on economic inequality and economic power began to spread to all sectors of society, as it became the issue of “a golden-spoon” and “a dirt-spoon.” A satiric “euphemism for those born into wealth and power,” the golden-spoons had access to the privileges and easily rose to the position using the family background and wealth.<sup>158</sup> However, the commoners, the dirt-spoons, had to shed blood, tear, and sweat to reach a glass ceiling, where only the privileged class can get access through that ceiling. This hopelessness of the young South Korean commoners in their 20s and 30s made them give-up their life events, such as a wedding, buying a house, and give birth. As a metric to see this phenomenon, the fertility level in South Korea recorded lowest in the world, reached 0.98 births per woman in 2018, which is much lower than the U.S. rate (1.72) and the Japanese rate (1.42).<sup>159</sup> Thus, it is not surprising to see the high political participation of the young generation in South Korean politics, which is not a typical phenomenon in other liberal democratic nations. They are detesting social injustice and inequality and supporting policies that help to alleviate their hopeless situation.

Also, with rigid glass ceilings formed in between classes, the New Generation began to adopt individualism—rejecting traditional mantra of “small individual sacrifice for the benefit of an entire society.” To the young South Koreans, the daily survival of one became the most imminent issue, and they do not have the luxury to look around others. Thus, the traditional values that the older generation often uses to scold the younger generation no longer affect positively. Similar reaction to perseverance and effort, the

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<sup>156</sup> The Gini coefficient is a metric to measure inequality using 0 to 1 scale, where 0 means complete equality and 1 means complete inequality. Steven Denney, “Number of Irregular Workers Continue to Rise in South Korea.”

<sup>157</sup> Sangwon Lee and Chorong Park, “Irregular worker wages, 54% of regular workers: Treatment and Welfare ‘Stepping Backward’,” *Yonhap News*, November 4, 2015, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20151104093251002>.

<sup>158</sup> Se-Woong Koo, “Korea, Thy Name is Hell Joseon.”

<sup>159</sup> Jake Kwon and Jessie Yeung, “South Korea’s fertility rate falls to record low,” *CNN*, August 29, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/08/29/asia/south-korea-fertility-intl-hnk-trnd/index.html>.

young South Koreans believe that if one bears the hardship and put more effort, one will eventually collapse without achieving anything, but only be extracted by the *kap*, the people in dominant positions. In the end, the New Generation wants to reform the current demoralizing domestic situation, through fighting against the existing politics—both left and right—and finding the new alternatives.

The second category (2) of the New Generation's characteristic is its evolved notion of nationalism. From the War Generation, each South Korean generation had its unique style of nationalism. However, the New Generation's nationalism is somewhat different from the previous characteristic of nationalism. First, the people from the New Generation want no outside influence on their government's decision—they want full autonomy and protection of sovereignty. Yet, at the same time, they want to nourish everything that could provide benefits to them, including foreign culture, foreign manufactured goods, and foreign travel. Park Sun-Young named this evolved nationalism as the practical nationalism, which is created by pick and chooses, and mix-matching the characteristics of different nationalisms.<sup>160</sup> This new type of nationalism often generates unpredictable results in public opinion. For one illustrated example, the New Generation could dislike President Trump and his foreign policies, but at the same time, they could like Starbucks coffee as their favorite coffee brand and want to visit New York City as a favorite travel destination. Another good example is the New Generation's weaker animosity toward Japan and Japanese people. Although nearly all Koreans, including the New Generation, dislike Japan due to history and culture. However, the recent opinion poll shows that the New Generation started to see Japan and Japanese people differently than older South Koreans. As shown in Table 1 and Figure 6, there is a clear negative perception that South Koreans have toward Japan as a nation, with only a slight improvement by the New Generation. However, as shown in Table 1 and Figure 7, there is a clear generational difference in South Korean perception towards Japanese people.

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<sup>160</sup> Sun-Young Park, "Shinsedae: Conservative Attitudes of a 'New Generation' in South Korea and the Impact on the Korean Presidential Election," *EWC Insights* 2:1 (September 2007), 2–3.

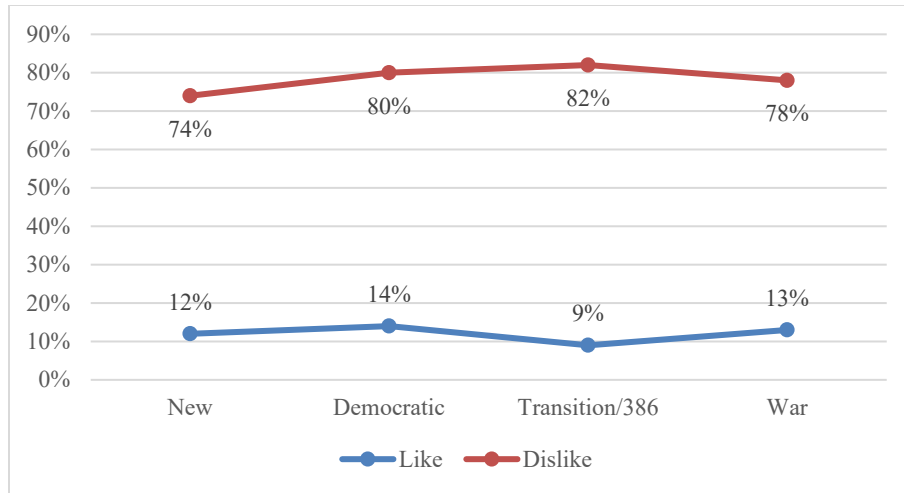


Figure 6. South Korean Generational Perception of Japan, July 2019<sup>161</sup>

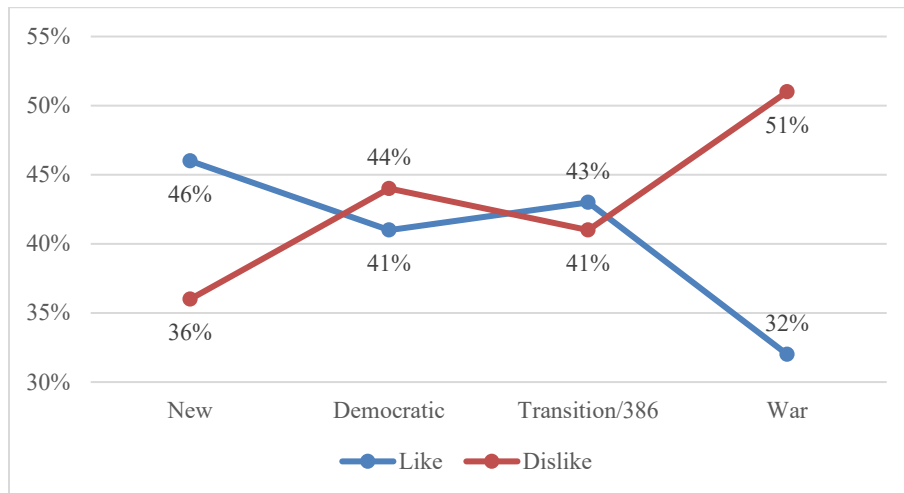


Figure 7. South Korean Generational Perception of Japanese People, July 2019<sup>162</sup>

This confirms that the people from the New Generation do not find inconsistency by favoring one nation's culture while condemning its foreign policy. This is because they have transitioned from a traditional nationalism that regards ethnic nation as a

<sup>161</sup> Adapted from Gallup Korea, "Daily Opinion (20190712)," July 2019, <https://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=1031>.

<sup>162</sup> Adapted from Gallup Korea, "Daily Opinion (20190712)," July 2019, <https://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=1031>.

predetermined identity to a practical nationalism that has much more gray zone in distinguishing one nation to another based on their needs. The young people in the New Generation make a distinction between specific things that they think important to have nationalistic sentiment and things that do not. For example, in the international competition or sports events, they become very nationalistic, and also when their nation is being persecuted unfairly, people get patriotic in their actions. However, when they are purchasing an imported item, young people tend to calculate the price value instead of where it originated, whereas some older generations simply boycott Japanese products altogether.

The third category (3) of the New Generation's characteristic is its conservatization in national security matters. As Mannheim states, it is conventional wisdom that the people tend to be (or become) more conservative as they grow older. This is because people get additional social responsibilities and psychological resistance to change. However, unlike this conventional wisdom, the youngest generation in South Korean society, the New Generation, shows strong conservatism on the issue of national security. Their point of view is somewhat similar to those of the War Generation. Although the New Generation has different rationale from the War Generation for its conservative security perception, they both want stability based on a more traditional approach—achieving security with the United States against the common threat, North Korea. The New Generation's special characteristic shows in two ways: its desire for the stronger U.S.-ROK alliance, and its intolerance on North Korea.

Although the New Generation's interest does not perfectly align with U.S. interests and foreign policy directions, based on the New Generation's practical nationalism, young South Koreans want a firm security assurance from the strong U.S.-ROK alliance. They also want a cooperative U.S.-ROK relationship against other regional security matters while having enough space for ROK's own diplomatic freedom. This trend can be confirmed through the 2017 Asan Institute's research of the South Korean perspective on the United States compared to China. As a rising power, China became a very important partner to South Korea for regional security and economy. Especially, the younger generation has personally witnessed the rise of China in recent years. Yet, the people in



their 20s have shown the most pro-American tendency among all age-groups in the research.<sup>163</sup> From all research categories (i.e., cultural influence, language preference, economic partnership, security cooperation), young South Korean showed a positive perspective towards the United States more than any other country.<sup>164</sup> As such, even though they grew up seeing the anti-American rhetoric and protests, it did not leave a cohort-effect on the people of the New Generation. Rather, their practical nationalism brought their attitude closer to the United States, as they want stability among all other values.

Also, people of the New Generation no longer want to tolerate any more on the North Korean threat and provocations. What they ultimately want is no more toleration of irresponsible North Korean actions. This strong opposition came from young South Koreans' experience of series of North Korean provocations when they were in the age-group for the mandatory military service.<sup>165</sup> For example, right after the incident of *Cheon-an* sinking in 2010, the number of volunteers to join the ROK Marines has spiked, reaching 3.5 to 1 volunteers to position ratio, which was unprecedented high.<sup>166</sup> Base on the Joongang Daily interview, one of the young volunteer replied, "North Korea's provocation provoked my challenge, I don't want to avoid it," and another volunteer replied, "I saw the servicemen of the same age die by the provocation of *Cheon-an* and Yeonpyeong-do, and I thought about North Korea's reality once more."<sup>167</sup> To young South Koreans who live in Hell-Joseon, North Korean hereditary leader, Kim Jong-un, is another kid with a golden-spoon who is in the same age-group with the New Generation. Thus, to

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<sup>163</sup> Jiyeon Kim, Choong-gu Kang, and Ji-hyung Lee, "Conditions of the Great Powers: Korean Perceptions of America," *Asan Institute for Policy Studies*, April, 17 2017, <http://www.asaninst.org/contents/%EA%B0%95%EB%8C%80%EA%B5%AD%EC%9D%98-%EC%A1%B0%EA%B1%B4-%ED%95%9C%EA%B5%AD%EC%9D%B8%EC%9D%98-%EB%8C%80%EB%AF%B8%E5%B0%8D%E7%BE%8E-%EC%9D%B8%EC%8B%9D/>.

<sup>164</sup> Jiyeon Kim, Choong-gu Kang, and Ji-hyung Lee, "Conditions of the Great Powers: Korean Perceptions of America."

<sup>165</sup> Sang-kap Han, "Different Security Perception of Today's Twenties," *East Asian Institute*, June 06, 2015, [http://www.eai.or.kr/main/publication\\_01\\_view.asp?intSeq=4065&board=kor\\_eaiinmedia](http://www.eai.or.kr/main/publication_01_view.asp?intSeq=4065&board=kor_eaiinmedia).

<sup>166</sup> Soo-jung Kim and Yong-soo Chung, "Youth of ROK is well and alive," *Joongang Daily*, December 14, 2010, <https://news.joins.com/article/4787837>.

<sup>167</sup> Soo-jung Kim and Yong-soo Chung, "Youth of ROK is well and alive."

young South Koreans, North Korea is the source of all the evil things that they are going through, and they want no more stress induced from the North as they are already getting too much stress in the first place.<sup>168</sup>

## **5. Similarities and Differences among Generations**

Each of four South Korean generations has its unique generational characteristics, but at the same time, some characteristics are continued on from one generation to another. All generational characteristics discussed in this section are consolidated in Table 7.

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<sup>168</sup> Bora Chung, “Anti-North sentiment in the twenties,” *Dong-A Daily*, February, 25, 2018, <https://shindonga.donga.com/3/all/13/1230785/>.

Table 7. Characteristics of South Korea Generations

	Generational Characteristics	
<b>War Generation</b>	<b>Nationalism</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ethnocentric</li> <li>- Anti-Japanese/Imperial Nationalism</li> <li>- Reunification</li> </ul> <b>Ideological Conflict</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Anti-communist</li> </ul> <b>Legacy of Authoritarian Regimes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Industrialization</li> <li>- Reconstruction</li> <li>- Controlled Society</li> <li>- Democratic Movement</li> </ul>	<b>North Korea</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Anti-North Korea</li> </ul> <b>United States</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pro-American</li> <li>- Strong Alliance</li> </ul> <b>Materialistic Survival</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Growth Priority</li> <li>- Accepting Civil Liberty Restrictions</li> <li>- Existential Threat</li> </ul>
<b>Transition/386 Generation</b>	<b>Nationalism</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sovereignty and Autonomy</li> <li>- Reunification</li> </ul> <b>Ideological Conflict</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Anti-Authoritarianism</li> <li>- Alternative in Socialism</li> </ul> <b>Democratic Movement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Underground Organizations</li> <li>- Suppression/Violence</li> <li>- Anti-Military Regimes/Dictators</li> <li>- Winning Mentality</li> </ul>	<b>North Korea</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pro-North Korea</li> <li>- Reconciliation</li> </ul> <b>United States</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Anti-American</li> <li>- Room for Independent Diplomacy</li> </ul> <b>Economic Stability</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Student Activism</li> <li>- Popular Culture/Consumerism</li> <li>- Admiring Free/Liberal Culture</li> </ul>
<b>Democratic Generation</b>	<b>Nationalism</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ideological/Economic Superiority</li> <li>- Reunification</li> </ul> <b>Post-Ideological Perspective</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Globalization/Liberalization</li> <li>- Civilian Government</li> <li>- No More Black/White Dichotomy</li> </ul> <b>Democratic Movement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social Inequality and Unfairness</li> <li>- Anti-Authoritarianism</li> </ul>	<b>North Korea</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pro-North Korea</li> <li>- Reconciliation</li> </ul> <b>United States</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Anti-American</li> <li>- Room for Independent Diplomacy</li> </ul> <b>Economic Stability</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Student Activism</li> <li>- Popular Culture/Consumerism</li> <li>- Admiring Free/Liberal Culture</li> </ul>
<b>New Generation</b>	<b>Nationalism</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Practical Nationalism</li> <li>- Anti-Ethnic Nationalism</li> <li>- Anti-Reunification</li> </ul> <b>Post-Ideological Perspective</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Globalization/Liberalization</li> <li>- Civilian Government</li> <li>- No More Black/White Dichotomy</li> </ul> <b>Hell-Joseon</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social Inequality and Unfairness</li> <li>- Anti-Authoritarianism</li> <li>- Hereditary Class Division</li> <li>- Golden Spoon/Dirt Spoon</li> <li>- Give-up</li> </ul>	<b>North Korea</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Anti-North Korea</li> </ul> <b>United States</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pro-American</li> <li>- Strong Alliance</li> <li>- Room for Independent Diplomacy</li> </ul> <b>Economic Struggle</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unemployment</li> <li>- Financial Crises</li> <li>- Glass Ceiling</li> </ul>

## **B. POLITICAL IMPACT OF GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES**

So far, the historical events and its cohort effects on each South Korean generation are discussed. Using the generational characteristics that are identified through the cohort experience analysis, this section will explain how these generational characteristics have impacted ROK politics. First, each generation's political relevance will be assessed. Second, each generation's political tendencies will be related to the unique classification of the Left Progressives and the Right Conservatives in South Korean society. Altogether, the political impact of the generational differences will be analyzed through these two explanations.

### **1. Political Relevance**

In order to measure the political relevance of each generation in the South Korean democratic society, the voting power of each generation and ROK presidential election results will be assessed. Voting power depicts how each generation is equally (or, fairly) represented in the society, in terms of its ability to make political impact according to the generation's interest and policy preferences. The presidential election result provides the political tendency of each generation since ROK Presidential candidates clearly represent either progressive left and conservative right. Through analyzing the election results, this thesis will assess how consistent each generation vote for left or right, and any unusual results that represent the generational characteristics.

#### ***a. Voting Power Calculation***

Table 8 and Table 9 illustrate the population makeup of each generation and voting rates in recent elections. Although the New Generation includes more people than other generational groups, its lower voting rate suggests that its political weight is no greater than that of older generations, (that is, when dealing with mass-level political patterns—as opposed to, say, elite-level policymaking, where younger generations are surely even less well represented). Therefore, each generation likely represents a roughly similar share of not only the ROK's overall population but also of its politically influential population (again, depending on the type of influence in question).

Table 8. South Korean Population by Age-Groups and Generations<sup>169</sup>

Age Group	Born Year	Generation	Population	Population Share by Age Group	Population Share by Generation
0-9	2010-2019	Under Voting Age	4224547	8.15%	17.85%
10-19	2000-2009		5029512	9.70%	
20-29	1990-1999	New Generation	6820949	13.16%	26.96%
30-39	1980-1989		7156062	13.80%	
40-49	1970-1979	Democracy Generation	8407480	16.22%	16.22%
50-59	1960-1969	Transition Generation	8680063	16.74%	16.74%
60-69	1950-1959	War Generation	6136869	11.84%	22.23%
70-79	1940-1949		3559132	6.86%	
Older	-1939		1830998	3.53%	
Total			51845612		

Note 1: Table reconstructed from ROK Ministry of Interior and Safety (MOIS) data.

<sup>169</sup> Adapted from K-Indicator, “Voting Rate (선거 투표율),” June 27, 2019, <https://www.index.go.kr/unify/idx-info.do?idxCd=4268&clasCd=7>.

Table 9. Voting Rates by South Korean Generations<sup>170</sup>

Generation	Age group	Population (Age-groups)	Population (Generation)	2016 20th Legislative Election Voting Rate	2017 19th Presidential Election Voting Rate	2018 7th Local Election Voting Rate	Average Voting Rate
New Generation	20-29	6820949	13977011	52.55%	76.00%	51.95%	59.89%
	30-39	7156062		50.45%	74.20%	54.20%	
Democracy Generation	40-49	8407480	8407480	54.30%	74.90%	58.60%	62.60%
Transition Generation	50-59	8680063	8680063	60.80%	78.60%	63.30%	67.57%
War Generation	60-69	6136869	11526999	71.70%	84.10%	72.50%	72.37%
	70-79	3559132		73.30%	81.80%	74.50%	
	Older	1830998		48.30%	56.20%	50.80%	
Total		42591553	42591553				

Note 1: Average Voting Rate calculated using population share and 2016–2018 voting rate data.

#### *b. Presidential Election Results*

Table 10 shows the past five presidential election results of South Korea. South Korea has a direct election system, which means the President will be elected by counting the total number of popular votes. Therefore, the voting power of each generation that was calculated above plays a significant role in analyzing the generational impact.

Although the born-year does not perfectly align with proposed generational classification criteria, it provides a useful gauge on how each generation voted in the last five Presidential elections. Also, the age-group distinction is not intended to be a rigid unalterable line on time, but rather an overlapping and malleable range of time block. Thus, for the purpose of analyzing the presidential election trend, this method of generational labeling provides a relevant distinction between the generational groups.

<sup>170</sup> Adapted from Ministry of the Interior and Safety, “National Census Population Statistics (주민등록 인구통계),” September 02, 2019, <http://27.101.213.4/#>; K-Indicator, “Voting Rate (선거 투표율),” June 27, 2019, <https://www.index.go.kr/unify/idx-info.do?idxCd=4268&clasCd=7>.

Table 10. South Korean Presidential Election Voting Results by Age Groups<sup>171</sup>

			Age-groups				
			20s	30s	40s	50s	60s
15th (1997)		Calculated Born-year	1968-1977	1958-1967	1948-1957	1938-1947	Older-1937
	C	Lee Hoi-chang	27.9%	34.8%	44.1%	51.0%	-
	P	Kim Dae-jung	43.2%	43.7%	37.2%	34.2%	-
16th (2002)		Calculated Born-year	1973-1982	1963-1972	1953-1962	1943-1952	Older-1942
	C	Lee Hoi-chang	37.9%	34.2%	47.9%	57.9%	63.5%
	P	Roh Moo-hyun	59.0%	59.3%	48.1%	40.1%	34.9%
17th (2007)		Calculated Born-year	1978-1987	1968-1977	1958-1967	1948-1957	Older-1947
	C	Lee Myung-bak	40.3%	39.7%	51.9%	60.9%	-
	C	Lee Hoi-chang	15.7%	15.8%	12.2%	12.3%	-
	P	Chung Dong-young	18.8%	27.7%	29.2%	23.5%	-
18th (2012)		Calculated Born-year	1983-1992	1973-1982	1963-1972	1953-1962	Older-1952
	C	Park Geun-hye	32.5%	28.3%	43.4%	64.1%	74.7%
	P	Moon Jae-in	66.7%	71.1%	56.4%	35.6%	25.2%
19th (2017)		Calculated Born-year	1988-1997	1978-1987	1968-1977	1958-1967	Older-1957
	C	Hong Jun-pyo	11.0%	9.0%	12.0%	26.0%	45.0%
	P	Ahn Cheol-soo	15.0%	16.0%	18.0%	20.0%	26.0%
	P	Moon Jae-in	46.0%	59.0%	55.0%	40.0%	23.0%

Legend:	New Generation
	Democratic
	Transition/386
	War Generation

Note 1: Table reconstructed from Gallup Korea Reports and MBC-HRC Exit Poll data.

Note 2: 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> election result data use “50s and older” category.

Note 3: “C” represent a conservative candidate; “P” represents a progressive candidate.

Analyzing the presidential election voting results by age-groups, there are few conclusions can be made. First, the War Generation wholeheartedly support the

<sup>171</sup> Adapted from Gallup Korea, “Gallup Report,” January 1998, <https://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=151>; Hye-kyung Park, “Analysis on 16<sup>th</sup> Presidential Election Result,” *Polinews*, December 21, 2002, <http://www.polinews.co.kr/news/article.html?no=12269>; Gallup Korea, “Gallup Report,” December 19, 2007, <https://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=169>; Gallup Korea, “Gallup Report,” December 19, 2012, <https://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=373>; Gallup Korea, “Daily Opinion (20170509),” May 08, 2017, <https://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=830>.

conservative candidate. For all five elections, the majority of people from the War Generation voted for conservative candidates. Especially, the War Generation voted Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye at a very high rate (60.9% for Lee, 74.7% and 64.1% for Park). This distinguishing point can be explained as the War Generation's leaning support for the legacies of authoritarian periods since President Lee was the successful ex-CEO of Hyundai Engineering and Construction during the industrialization era, and President Park is the daughter of their beloved leader, Park Chung-hee.

Second, except for the 2007 Presidential Election, which was a landslide victory shifting from the 10-years of progressive governments, the majority of all other generations had voted the progressive candidates in these elections. The aging effect can be seen from the Transition/386 Generation, as they became more close-run once they became the 50s age-group (after the 17<sup>th</sup> Presidential Election). However, they still show slightly more leaning towards progressive candidates, which can be explained with the cohort effect on this generation. Also, the Democratic Generation shows the most progressive tendency in all elections. The cohort effect on this generation is very strong that many speculators believe that this generation will stay as left progressive even after they become the oldest generation. This is because the people from the Democratic Generation experienced both political struggles as they participated in student activism and social issues stemmed from inequality and injustice in ROK society. Synergistically, these two experiences provide the Democratic Generation a tendency to resolve social issues through active participation in politics, which drives them to lean more left against the privileged right.

Third, regardless of a conservative perspective on national security matters, the New Generation is a strong supporter of the progressive candidates. However, no certain conclusion can be made yet because there is not much data to clearly see the trend. The New Generation's support can be explained either as a personal attraction to President Moon Jae-in, or detestation of the privileged conservatives (authoritative older-generations). Either way, the New Generation seems to value the left progressive identities and agenda at the same time, and it holds conflicting perceptions towards the U.S. and North Korea.



## **2. Left vs. Right**

In South Korea, there is a political spectrum that stretches from left progressives to right conservatives. This political spectrum holds many different social/political/economic issues, and these political issues are represented by numerous political parties and their supporters. However, unlike many other liberal democratic nations, South Korea has its unique classification of left versus right due to its political history and the geopolitical situation. Figure 8 shows some factors that differentiate the political identity in South Korea and how people from each generation identify themselves.

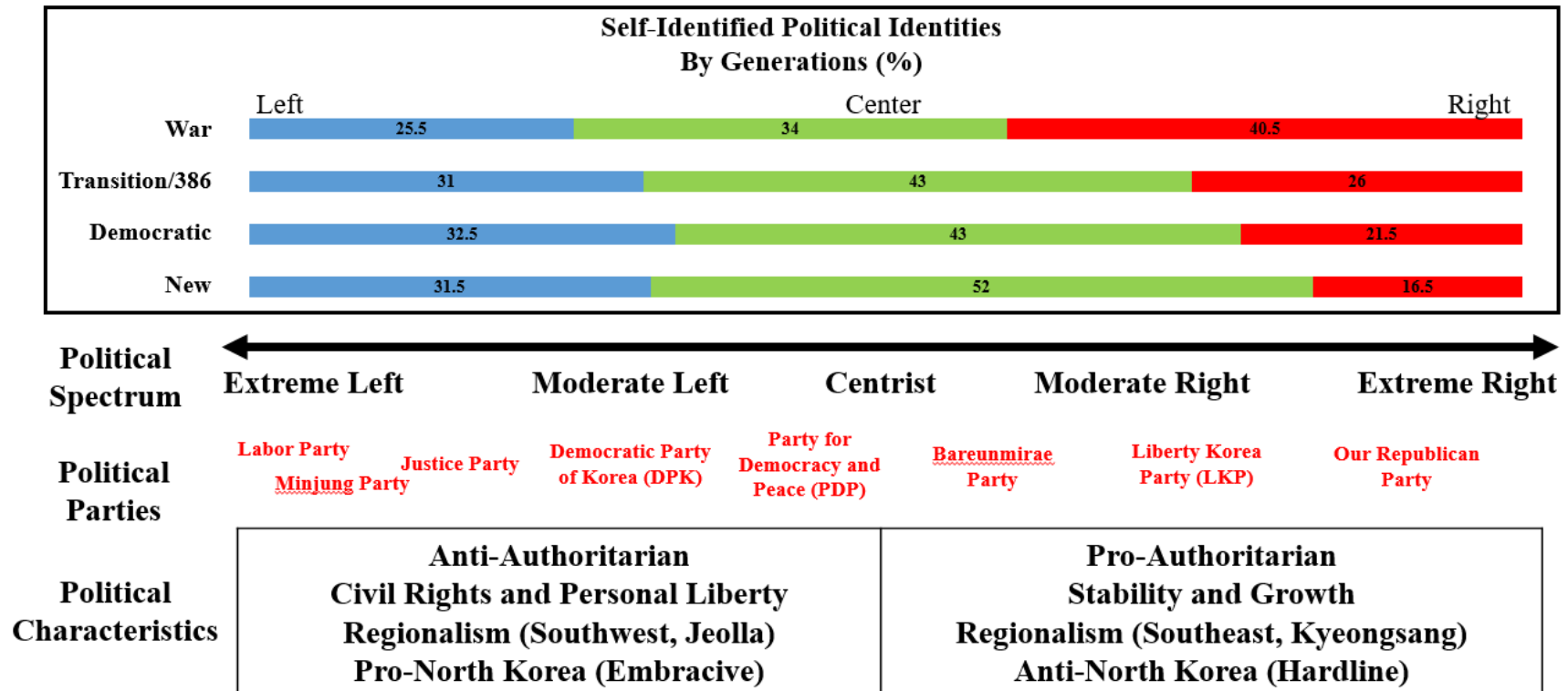


Figure 8. South Korean Political Spectrum and Self-Identified Generational Political Identities<sup>172</sup>

<sup>172</sup> Adapted from Trend Monitor, “Assessment of Political Propensity and Perspective on National Issues in 2018,” Embrain Trend Monitor, June, 2018, <https://trendmonitor.co.kr/tmweb/trend/allTrend/detail.do?bIdx=1689&code=0404&trendType=CKOREA>.

Among many factors that differentiate the political identities in South Korea, the issue of “personal freedom” is one of the most important factors that divides left from right, and conservatives from progressives.<sup>173</sup> This factor comes from the legacy of authoritarian military regimes. South Korean authoritarian regimes have used the suppression of civil rights and personal liberty to control society and political oppositions. The South Korean conservatives, who value the stability and growth, support this authoritarian style—even if it requires a small sacrifice of personal freedom. As an opposition, the South Korean progressives, who place their roots on the democratic protesters against the authoritarian social order, value personal freedom and civil liberty before anything. Contrary to the personal freedom factor, the majority of progressives and conservatives regard the issue of market freedom as secondary as they both agree that some level of government intervention is necessary to maintain its economic growth.<sup>174</sup>

Regionalism is another factor that had a strong impact and still has a significant impact on the political identities of South Korean people. As shown in Figure 9, the presidential election results are showing a significant factional divide between west and east, especially between the Jeolla Province (Southwest) and the Gyeongsang Province (Southeast).

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<sup>173</sup> Ipsos Public Korea, “Analysis on South Korean political identities,” Ipsos Issue Report 21, November 5, 2018, <https://www.ipsos.com/ko-kr/ibsoseu-peobeullig-hangugin-jeongchiseonghyang-josagyeolgwa-bunseog-hangug-gugmin-jasinui-jeongchi>.

<sup>174</sup> Ipsos Public Korea, “Analysis on South Korean political identities.”

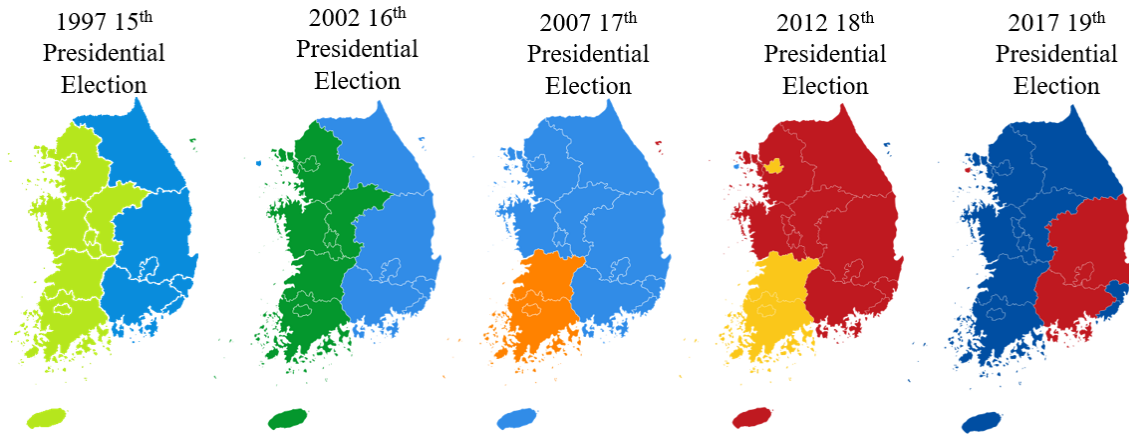


Figure 9. South Korean Presidential Election Results by Region<sup>175</sup>

There are three explanations for this South Korean regionalism. The first is the historical explanation that this regional rivalry between Southwest and Southeast come from rivalries of ancient Korean kingdoms, *Baekje* and *Silla*.<sup>176</sup> The second explanation comes from uneven economic development under the authoritarian military leaders, from Park Chung-hee, Chun Doo-hwan, and Roh Tae-woo. As all three presidents came from the Southeast region, they developed Southeast into a major industrial hub with a lot of investment in infrastructures while Southwest was left as a poor agricultural region.<sup>177</sup> The third explanation is the political rivalry between Southeast-supported candidates and Kim Dae-jung, who came from the Southwest region.<sup>178</sup> Kim Dae-jung had run continuously against the conservative presidential candidates from Southeast, Park Chung-hee, Roh Tae-woo, and Kim Young-sam. He finally won and became South Korea's first progressive president in 1997. Throughout his life, he was the most important political symbol of the Jeolla region, and he is still remembered as a "Respected Teacher" in the Jeolla Province.

<sup>175</sup> Adapted from Wikipedia, s.v. "대한민국 제 19 대 대통령 선거," last modified January 17, 2020, [https://ko.wikipedia.org/wiki/%EB%8C%80%ED%95%9C%EB%AF%BC%EA%B5%AD\\_%EC%A0%9C19%EB%8C%80\\_%EB%8C%80%ED%86%B5%EB%A0%B9\\_%EC%84%A0%EA%B1%B0](https://ko.wikipedia.org/wiki/%EB%8C%80%ED%95%9C%EB%AF%BC%EA%B5%AD_%EC%A0%9C19%EB%8C%80_%EB%8C%80%ED%86%B5%EB%A0%B9_%EC%84%A0%EA%B1%B0).

<sup>176</sup> Se-Woong Koo, "The Potent Force of S Korea's Regionalism," *Korea Expose*, April 27, 2017, <https://www.koreaexpose.com/potent-force-koreas-regionalism/>.

<sup>177</sup> Se-Woong Koo, "The Potent Force of S Korea's Regionalism."

<sup>178</sup> Se-Woong Koo, "The Potent Force of S Korea's Regionalism."

As such, there is a long historical background to South Korea's regionalism, and traditionally, South Koreans voters have "not deviated much from their respective tendencies."<sup>179</sup> There is a new trend that shows the breakdown of this regionalism factor as the generation gets younger since younger South Koreans have not personally experienced the regional rivalries. Yet, the significance of regional background and its associated identity might continue on for the future.

Also, another critical factor that differentiates political left from the right is the stance towards North Korea. Ideologically speaking, Korean War already divided right-wing (free democracy) in the South and left-wing (communism) in the North. As two countries are still fighting this ideological war, it is hard to live as an ideological left in South Korea—as right belligerently criticize left as being "commies."<sup>180</sup> Therefore, the left progressives who are softer and embrative toward North Korea was an easy target during the military authoritarian period. It was not until the progressive 10-years under Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, that this left progressives publicly solidified their posture toward North Korea.<sup>181</sup> On the contrary, the people who have a more hardline stance toward North Korea, who express anti-communist and more aggressive absorptive unification policy, often classify themselves as right conservatives.<sup>182</sup> This political factionalism based on North Korean policy creates a unique mixture of terminologies in South Korea. The term left (좌파), and progressive (진보) often used as one word with similar meaning, especially for the older generations who tend to see the new-order seeking revolutionaries as all commies.<sup>183</sup> However, this separation of terminology becomes more clear to the younger generation, who sees less convincing that labeling progressive and moderate policies as communism.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Se-Woong Koo, "The Potent Force of S Korea's Regionalism."

<sup>180</sup> Haeryun Kang and Ben Jackson, "What 'Progressive' Means in South Korea," *Korea Expose*, March 22, 2017, <https://www.koreaexpose.com/progressive-meaning-south-korea/>.

<sup>181</sup> Haeryun Kang and Ben Jackson, "What 'Progressive' Means in South Korea."

<sup>182</sup> Haeryun Kang and Ben Jackson, "What 'Progressive' Means in South Korea."

<sup>183</sup> Haeryun Kang and Ben Jackson, "What 'Progressive' Means in South Korea."

<sup>184</sup> Haeryun Kang and Ben Jackson, "What 'Progressive' Means in South Korea."

As such, the factors that affect the division of political identity in South Korea sprouted from the historical experience, and these historical experiences also have affected the generational characteristics of each South Korean generation. Therefore, there is a relevant correlation between the generational identity and the political identity in South Korea (i.e., the War Generation at the right end of the political spectrum and the Democratic Generation at another end of the spectrum, with the Transition/386 Generation and the New Generation in between). However, the over-generalization of the political tendencies with a specific generation should be avoided since different political views can coexist within a generation. One exemplary case is the rise of the New-Right (뉴라이트) faction within the traditionally-left Transition/386 Generation. They are the people who transitioned from the progressive faction, who used to fight against authoritarianism, to the conservative faction as they were later found disagreement with progressive values and attracted by the neoliberal economy.<sup>185</sup> These new conservatives within the Transition/386 Generation played a big role in policymaking during President Lee Myung-bak and President Park Geun-hye.<sup>186</sup>

### C. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the analysis has confirmed the significance of the cohort effect on the South Korean generational characteristics. Each of four South Korean generations has developed its unique propensity and identity from the cohort experiences of its youth years on social/political/economic issues, which affects their views on North Korea, the United States, and South Korean autonomy.

Also, these different generational characteristics impact the South Korean politics. South Korea's unique geopolitical environment and historical experiences have created a special classification method of political left versus right and the progressive versus the conservative. This political spectrum is organized based on diverging perspectives on authoritarianism, personal freedom, regional background, and stance toward North Korea.

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<sup>185</sup> Jae-Heung Park, *Generational Difference and Conflict: Theory and Reality*, 78.

<sup>186</sup> Jae-Heung Park, *Generational Difference and Conflict: Theory and Reality*, 78.

Since these issues with diverging perspectives stem from the similar historical experiences that distinguish the generational characteristics of the four South Korean generations, the correlation between the political propensity and generational characteristics of each generation is confirmed. South Korean is a liberal democracy, and popular perception can make a difference in political decisions. Thus, generational political propensity can influence the South Korean policy decisions on the matters of national security and the future of the U.S.-ROK alliance.

Therefore, the public opinion poll will be analyzed to investigate the South Korean perspectives on the national security and the U.S.-ROK alliance in the next chapter, focusing on the three issues: 1) perceptions of North Korea, 2) perceptions of the United States and U.S. forces in Korea, and 3) perceptions of ROK national autonomy. For individual issues, regional background, generation, and self-identified political identity of poll respondents will be taken into a comprehensive assessment to confirm the significant difference and distinction among South Korean generations on national security issues.

### **III. GENERATIONAL IMPACTS ON U.S.-ROK SECURITY ALLIANCE**

In this chapter, the South Korean generational influence on three national security matters will be analyzed. The three national security matters are South Korean perceptions on North Korea, the United States, and ROK national autonomy. On each South Korean national security matters, public opinion poll data will be used to assess how each generation thinks differently on the issues that are related to the national security. This thesis did not design or conducted public opinion polls but carefully selected existing polling data from the professional polling agencies. There are some limitations to directly utilize the collected dataset, so some data are reconstructed for better fitting in the data analysis. Every alteration of the original data is noted in the data presented.

To capture the effect of current events and increase the relevancy of the dataset, only the recent opinion polls (polls conducted after 2018) were used. Also, using a more recent dataset helps to minimize the conversion error while in the converting age-group (e.g., 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s) to four generations (e.g., New Generation, Democratic Generation, Transition/386 Generation, War Generation). For example, people in their 20s and 30s in 2019 were born between 1980 to 1999, which largely overlap with the year-groups of the New Generation (1981-2000). However, this meaningful overlap of the age-group and the generational classification starts to deviate when the older data is used. Thus, only the recent poll data (2018-2019) are used in this analysis.

Overall, the data analysis in this Chapter has confirmed the difference in generational tendencies in each national security matters. Through analyzing the trend on specific issues within each national security factor (North Korea, the United States, ability to self-defense), this chapter concludes that there are noticeable, consistent, and academically significant differences among South Korean generations on the issues of ROK national security.



## **A. GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON NORTH KOREA**

The issue regarding North Korea is a key factor in understanding the South Korean national security situation. Ever since the division of the nation, North Korea and South Korea have been the biggest security threat to each other and continue to point their guns at each other until this day. Also, as discussed in Chapter II, the South Korean perception towards North Korea is one of the most distinctive factors that bisects the political identity in ROK.

The expected generational tendencies can be drawn from the cohort-experience analysis conducted in Chapter II (refer to Table 7 for the detailed generational characteristics). The youngest New Generation and oldest War Generation are expected to have a negative perception towards North Korea, while the Democratic Generation and the Transition/386 Generation are expected to have a more positive perception towards North Korea. Thus, this section will assess how these expected South Korean generational tendencies are expressed in the opinion poll data.

### **1. Perception of Current North Korean Leader, Kim Jong-un**

The first opinion poll was selected to see how each South Korean generation perceives differently on the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un. The poll question asked was: How do you feel about DPRK leader, Kim Jong-un? The opinion poll result is shown in Table 11.

The poll was conducted during May 2018. Leading up to this time, there was a peaceful atmosphere developed in inter-Korean relations. President Moon Jae-in and Chairman Kim Jong-un had their second high-level summit meeting at Panmunjom on May 26, 2018. Also, President Trump sent a positive message to Chairman Kim, and two leaders were preparing for the Singapore Summit, which happened later in June 2018. Therefore, there could be a slight leaning of South Korean public opinion towards a more favorable perception. Also, based on the historical analysis from Chapter II, the South Korean progressives are expected to show a more favorable stance towards North Korea and higher trust towards North Korean leaders.

Table 11. South Korean Perception of Kim Jong-un (May 2018)<sup>187</sup>

		Sample Size	Favorable	Not Favorable	No answer
Total		1000	31%	55%	14%
Region	Seoul	195	29%	56%	15%
	Gyeong-gi	301	34%	55%	12%
	Gangwon	30	-	-	-
	Chung-cheong	105	31%	56%	13%
	Jeolla	100	43%	38%	19%
	Gyeong-buk	101	23%	58%	18%
	Gyeong-nam	155	29%	62%	9%
	Jeju	12	-	-	-
Generation	New	346	21%	69%	10%
	Democratic	202	40%	46%	13%
	Transition	200	43%	48%	9%
	War	251	28%	50%	22%
Political Identity	Conservative	182	20%	69%	10%
	Center-middle	274	28%	60%	12%
	Progressive	366	44%	45%	10%
	None	178	20%	54%	26%

Note 1: Table reconstructed from Gallup Korea data, the original data shows age-group as decades (30s, 40s, etc).

Note 2: The original data has not given statistics for sample size smaller than 50.

The result shows a noticeable pattern among each criterion and follows the expected tendencies. Among regions, Jeolla province, the most left-progressive province in South Korea, specifically showed a more favorable stance (43% favorable/38% non-favorable) than other provinces (23-34% favorable/55-62% non-favorable). Among generations, the Democratic and Transition/386 generations showed near double the favorable stance (40-43%-favorable) than the New and War generations (21-28%-favorable). Self-identified political identities also followed the expected results as well: a

<sup>187</sup> Adapted from Gallup Korea, “Daily Opinion (20180531),” May 2018, <https://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=931>.

more favorable perception from the progressives and a more non-favorable perception from the conservatives and center-middles.

## **2. Perception of North Korean Regime**

The next opinion poll is asking a similar question to the first opinion poll, but this poll was specifically selected to see how each South Korean generation perceives differently on Kim Jong-un and North Korean ruling class. The poll question asked was: How do you feel about the North Korean regime and ruling powers?

The poll was conducted during August 2018 as a part of research on Korean reunification. There was a continued mood of reconciliation as Chairman Kim Jong-un had used a top-down method to express his will to negotiate for peace and denuclearization. However, there was a speculation from South Korean news media that Kim Jong-un had to face a domestic political resistance when he met with President Trump to discuss denuclearization and peace treaty—especially from the North Korean military.<sup>188</sup> Thus, Kim Jong-un and North Korean political elites should be seen as separate entities in the discussion of bringing peace in the Korean peninsula, as these two parties' interests might not be the same in that regard. Unlike the first opinion poll, this poll asked about the North Korean regime and its ruling political power as a whole, so the results should reflect the different feelings that South Koreans have towards Kim and North Korean political elites. The opinion poll result is shown in Table 12.

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<sup>188</sup> Young-ho Kim, "North Korea's military coup cannot be ruled out after Hanoi," *Pennmike*, March 20, 2019, [https://www.pennmike.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=17250&replyAll=&reply\\_sc\\_order=by=I](https://www.pennmike.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=17250&replyAll=&reply_sc_order=by=I).

Table 12. South Korean Perception of North Korean Regime (August 2018)<sup>189</sup>

		Sample Size	Favorable	Neutral	Not Favorable
Total		1000	20.6%	43.9%	35.4%
Region	Seoul	194	18.9%	45.4%	35.7%
	Gyeong-gi	303	20.3%	43.1%	36.5%
	Gangwon	29	20.7%	48.3%	31.0%
	Chung-cheong	106	25.6%	39.2%	35.2%
	Jeolla	102	22.9%	53.2%	23.9%
	Gyeong-buk	102	13.1%	45.7%	41.2%
	Gyeong-nam	153	21.5%	40.7%	37.8%
	Jeju	11	45.5%	18.2%	36.4%
Generation	New	333	13.0%	48.7%	38.4%
	Democratic	202	24.7%	48.9%	26.4%
	Transition	205	28.9%	38.6%	32.5%
	War	260	16.9%	38.2%	41.2%
Political Identity	Conservative	-	-	-	-
	Center-middle	-	-	-	-
	Progressive	-	-	-	-

Note 1: Table reconstructed from KBS data, the original data shows age-group as decades (30s, 40s, etc).

Note 2: The original data has not given statistics for political identity.

Overall, the result follows the same pattern from the first opinion poll that asked about the perception of Kim Jong-un. It shows the biggest favorability difference between Jeolla and Gyeong-buk provinces, and the result shows more negative perception from the New and War generations and a more positive perception from the Democratic and Transition/386 generations. Unlike the original speculation, the data pattern does not show a relevant deviation from the pattern of the first opinion poll. The South Korean people perceive similarly on both Kim Jong-un and North Korea's ruling powers. One difference

<sup>189</sup> Adapted from Korean Broadcasting System, "2018 South Korean Reunification Survey," August 2018, <http://office.kbs.co.kr/tongil/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2018/08/2018-KBS-%EA%B5%AD%EB%AF%BC%ED%86%B5%EC%9D%BC%EC%9D%98%EC%8B%9D%EC%A1%B0%EC%82%AC.pdf.pdf>.

compared to the first poll was that this poll had a large number of people who answered neutral, or not-bad (그저그렇다), but this does not alter the trend pattern. Thus, we can conclude that this opinion poll also follows generational tendencies based on their cohort experience and characteristics.

### **3. Perception of Economic Aids to North Korea**

The next opinion poll was selected to see how each South Korean generation perceives differently on the aids that are sent to North Korea. The poll question asked was: Which do you agree? 1) If North Korea decides not to abandon its nuclear program, South Korea should cease all aids to North Korea, or 2) Even if North Korea decides not to abandon its nuclear program, South Korea should continue the humanitarian aids to North Korea.

The poll was conducted during May 2019. One week prior to this poll was taken, the Executive Board President of the UN World Food Program (UNWFP) visited South Korea and met with ROK government officials to discuss the famine issue in North Korea. The official UNWFP report suggests partner nations' humanitarian relief donation to North Korea to support 11 million undernourished people.<sup>190</sup> However, this humanitarian aid issue created friction within the U.S.-ROK relations as the United States wanted to continue the full-pressure economic sanctions to coerce North Korea to come to the negotiation table. Also, between May 4 and 9, North Korea tested dozens of missiles over the East Sea (Sea of Japan). This broke the 522 days without a North Korean missile test. This resumption of North Korean hostile action happened two months after the failed Hanoi summit, and just a few days after the U.S.-ROK alliance announcement of its plan for a new joint military exercise, *Dong-maeng*.<sup>191</sup> Therefore, public opinion could have mixed feelings in this complex environment. Potentially, the progressive generations could focus more on "we are all one family" ethnic nationalism and support the humanitarian aids, whereas the

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<sup>190</sup> World Food Program, "Democratic People's Republic of Korea," United Nations, accessed January 27, 2020, <https://www.wfp.org/countries/democratic-peoples-republic-korea>.

<sup>191</sup> Ankit Panda and Vipin Narang, "Why North Korea Is Testing Missiles Again," *Foreign Affairs*, May 16, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-korea/2019-05-16/why-north-korea-testing-missiles-again>.

conservative generations could focus more on military provocation and uncooperativeness of the North Korean regime and unsupportive on the humanitarian aids. The opinion poll result is shown in Table 13.

Table 13. South Korean Perception of Economic Aids to North Korea (May 2019)<sup>192</sup>

		Sample Size	Cease all aids	Continue humanitarian aids	No answer
Total		1000	54%	38%	8%
Region	Seoul	194	56%	36%	8%
	Gyeong-gi	305	48%	43%	9%
	Gangwon	30	-	-	-
	Chung-cheong	105	60%	35%	5%
	Jeolla	99	44%	46%	10%
	Gyeong-buk	100	69%	23%	8%
	Gyeong-nam	154	57%	38%	5%
	Jeju	13	-	-	-
Generation	New	341	58%	37%	6%
	Democratic	197	42%	52%	6%
	Transition	199	50%	42%	8%
	War	263	61%	27%	12%
Political Identity	Conservative	211	69%	26%	5%
	Center-middle	343	59%	36%	5%
	Progressive	267	34%	61%	5%
	None	180	56%	24%	20%

Note 1: Table reconstructed from Gallup Korea data, the original data shows age-group as decades (30s, 40s, etc).

Note 2: The original data has not given statistics for sample size smaller than 50.

The result shows a noticeable pattern among each criterion and follows the expected tendencies. Overall, more than half of the ROK public wants to cease all humanitarian aids if North Korea continues its military provocations. Also, a consistent

<sup>192</sup> Adapted from Gallup Korea, “Daily Opinion (20190516),” May 2019, <https://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=1013>.

trend is showing in the result that left-progressives (Jeolla region, Democratic and Transition/386 generations, self-identified progressives) are in support for humanitarian aids, whereas the right-conservatives (Gyeong-buk region, New and War generations, self-identified conservatives) are in support for maintaining the hardline sanction against the North Korean regime.

#### **4. Perception of North Korean Credibility**

The last opinion poll is about the South Korean perception of North Korean credibility—how much it can be trusted. For this opinion poll, this thesis took two polls that asked the same question from different time periods. One poll was conducted in May 2018, and another was conducted in October 2019. The question that both polls asked was: do you believe that North Korea will keep its promises such as Denuclearization, Declaration of Peace, and the Peace Treaty?

Two opinion polls were captured in the analysis to verify that generational tendencies do not get affected by the atmosphere changes. For example, on the one hand, May 2018 poll represents one of the most benign perspectives of South Koreans towards North Korea. Leading up to this time, series of top-level summits were conducted between the South and the North, and President Moon Jae-in and Chairman Kim Jong-un signed the “Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity, and Unification of the Korean Peninsula” on April 27, 2018.<sup>193</sup> On the other hand, October 2019 poll represents one of the most hostile perspectives of South Koreans towards North Korea. Beginning in May 2019, North Korea resumed its missile test program as a response to ongoing economic sanctions on North Korea. South Korean public saw North Korea violating the Panmunjom Declaration by resuming hostile actions. Also, North Korea tested submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) the day after it has agreed to resume nuclear talks, and the actual talk in Stockholm fell apart just in one day as North Korean delegations walked out from the room blaming

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<sup>193</sup> Patrick Monaghan, “Don’t Forget About the Panmunjom Declaration,” *The Diplomat*, May 30, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/05/dont-forget-about-the-panmunjom-declaration/>.

the United States.<sup>194</sup> From these series of events, the South Korean public grew upset towards North Korea's irresponsible actions and became intolerant to its malicious-intended behaviors. The opinion poll results are shown in Table 14, and the data reflects different general public attitudes towards North Korea between May 2018 and October 2019 timeframes.

Table 14. South Korean Perception of North Korean Credibility (May 2018/ October 2019)<sup>195</sup>

		May 2018	Oct 2019	May 2018	Oct 2019	May 2018	Oct 2019	May 2018	Oct 2019
		Sample Size		NK will keep its promise		NK will not keep the promise		No answer	
Total		1002	1002	49%	21%	30%	64%	21%	14%
Region	Seoul	200	193	44%	21%	35%	68%	21%	11%
	Gyeong-gi	295	308	56%	20%	29%	66%	16%	13%
	Gangwon	30	30	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Chung-cheong	103	104	45%	18%	28%	66%	26%	17%
	Jeolla	99	99	67%	36%	17%	38%	17%	26%
	Gyeong-buk	99	100	34%	16%	33%	74%	34%	10%
	Gyeong-nam	162	156	42%	20%	36%	66%	22%	15%
	Jeju	14	12	-	-	-	-	-	-
Generation	New	330	291	52%	26%	32%	61%	18%	12%
	Democratic	206	213	59%	31%	24%	58%	17%	11%
	Transition	210	211	51%	20%	31%	65%	18%	15%
	War	256	268	35%	9%	33%	72%	32%	18%
Political Identity	Conservative	187	273	26%	8%	57%	87%	17%	5%
	Center-middle	272	303	47%	20%	35%	66%	19%	13%
	Progressive	366	274	69%	41%	15%	44%	15%	15%

Note 1: Table reconstructed from Gallup Korea data, the original data shows age-group as decades (30s, 40s, etc).

Note 2: The original data has not given statistics for sample size smaller than 50.

<sup>194</sup> Jung Pak, "Why North Korea walked away from negotiations in Sweden," *Brookings*, October 18, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/10/18/why-north-korea-walked-away-from-negotiations-in-sweden/>.

<sup>195</sup> Adapted from Gallup Korea, "Daily Opinion (20180531)," May 2018, <https://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=931>; Gallup Korea, "Daily Opinion (20191010)," October 2019, <https://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=1051>.



The result shows a noticeable pattern among each criterion and follows the expected tendencies. Regardless of the timeframe, a consistent trend is showing in the result that left-progressives (Jeolla region, Democratic and Transition/386 generations, self-identified progressives) are more trusting North Korea will keep its promises, whereas the right-conservatives (Gyeong-buk region, New and War generations, self-identified conservatives) do not trust North Korea. Generationally, the trend lines show similar shapes, which means that regardless of the public atmosphere, each generation has structured tendencies that it follows. As shown in Figure 10, the trend line looks almost identical except that of its position on the y-axis. Thus, there is a generational difference in the South Korean perception of North Korean credibility, and the generational response follows a similar pattern from poll results on the other North Korea-related issues.

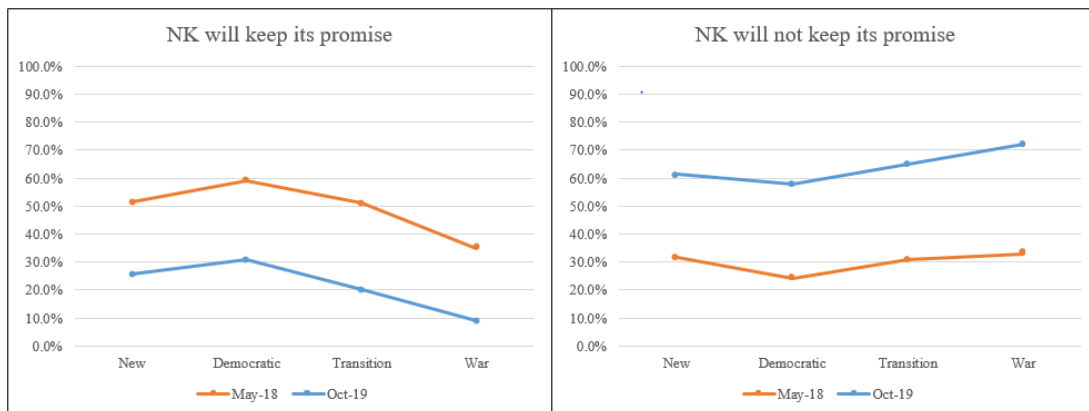


Figure 10. South Korean Opinion Poll Results on North Korean Credibility, Reproduced from May 2018 and October 2019 Data<sup>196</sup>

## 5. Trend Analysis of Generational Perspectives—North Korean Issues

There are some common features that we confirmed from the opinion poll analysis over the South Korean generational perception of North Korea-related issues. First, all four public opinion poll graphs depict a very similar pattern of a trend line. According to the

<sup>196</sup> Adapted from Gallup Korea, “Daily Opinion (20180531);” Gallup Korea, “Daily Opinion (20191010).”

shape of trend lines shown in Figure 11, the lines have a set of bell-shaped curves with the two ends diverging outward in opposite directions.

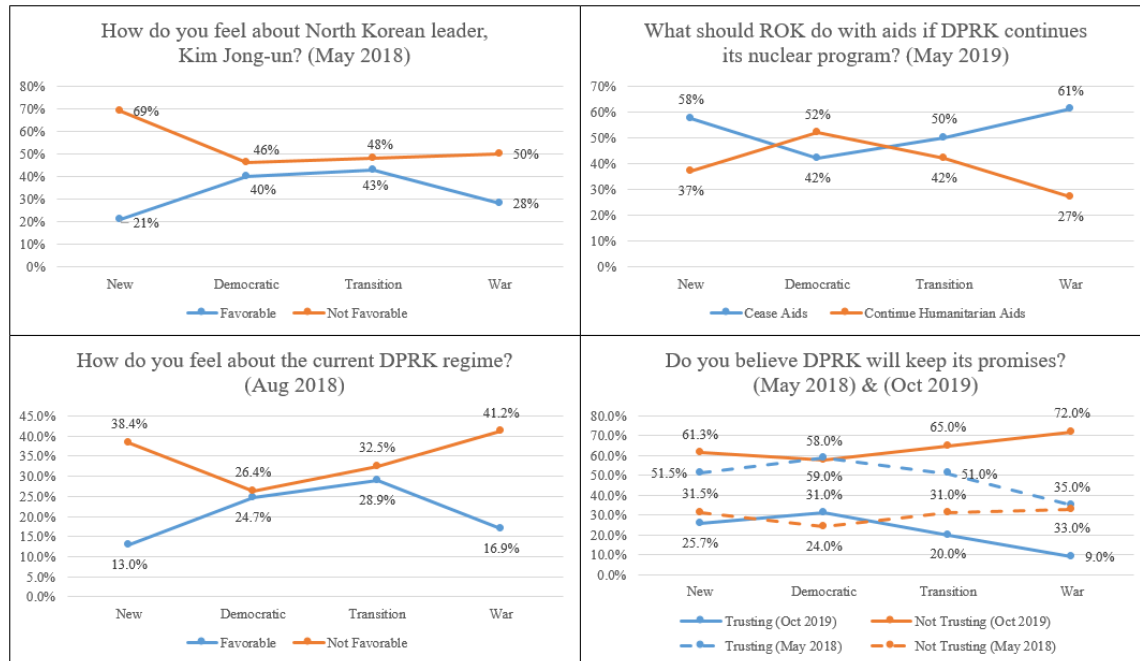


Figure 11. Generational Perspective on All Four North Korean Issues, Graphs Represent Opinion Poll Data from Table 11 through Table 14<sup>197</sup>

This bell-shape represents that the youngest and oldest generations (New and War generations) behave more antagonistic against North Korea, whereas the center generations (Democratic and Transition/386 generations) have a more cooperative position towards North Korea. This follows the expected tendencies of South Korean generations as the generational characteristics defined using the cohort experience analysis (refer to Table 7). Between the two pro-North Korean generations, the Democratic Generation seems to have more hopeful trust towards North Korea as poll results showed on the issues of humanitarian aids and credibility. Based on their cohort experience of post-Cold War peace, people from the Democratic Generation believe that North Korea will soon open their

<sup>197</sup> Adapted from Gallup Korea, “Daily Opinion (20180531);” Korean Broadcasting System, “2018 South Korean Reunification Survey; Gallup Korea, “Daily Opinion (20190516);” Gallup Korea, “Daily Opinion (20180531);” Gallup Korea, “Daily Opinion (20191010).”

borders and start the economic/political reforms towards Korean reconciliation. However, unlike the Democratic Generation, the Transition/386 Generation has experienced the ideological fight and hostile times. Therefore, although the Transition/386 Generation shows the highest favorability rate towards the North Korean regime based on its cohort characteristics, it holds a more realistic (and somewhat pessimistic) perspective on peacefully resolving the inter-Korean issues that are both long-lasting and intricate.

## **B. GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON US-ROK ALLIANCE**

The U.S.-ROK alliance is a key military institution that holds the U.S.-ROK relationship integrated even under some disputes and disagreements. Regardless of political interpretation, the presence of the USFK in South Korea ensured the domestic stability and prevented another Korean War. Even though the times of reforms and situational changes, the U.S.-ROK alliance remained as one of the key factors to understand the South Korean national security situation. Furthermore, the unique cohort experiences of the South Korean population have developed divergent perspectives on the United States and the roles and responsibilities of the U.S.-ROK alliance.

The expected generational tendencies can be drawn from the cohort-experience analysis conducted in Chapter II. In a quick review, the generational characteristics and tendencies on the U.S.-ROK alliance are inversely related to generational perceptions on the North Korean issues. The youngest New Generation and oldest War Generation are expected to have a positive perception towards the United States and its role on ROK national security, whereas the Democratic Generation and the Transition/386 Generation are expected to have a more negative perception towards the United States and the U.S.-ROK alliance. Thus, this section will assess how the expected South Korean generational tendencies are expressed in the opinion poll data and whether there is a discrepancy between expected tendencies and the poll outcome.

## 1. Perception of USFK Credibility

The first opinion poll is about whether the South Korean population is trusting the USFK for the ROK's national security. The poll question asked was: Do you trust the U.S. Forces in Korea? The opinion poll result is shown in Table 15.

Table 15. South Korean Perception of USFK Credibility (January 2019)<sup>198</sup>

		Sample Size	Trust	Distrust
Total		1000	62.5%	34.4%
Region	Seoul	-	-	-
	Gyeong-gi	-	-	-
	Gangwon	-	-	-
	Chung-cheong	-	-	-
	Jeolla	-	-	-
	Gyeong-buk	-	-	-
	Gyeong-nam	-	-	-
	Jeju	-	-	-
Generation	New	-	62.2%	35.2%
	Democratic	-	55.9%	42.8%
	Transition	-	62.2%	34.7%
	War	-	68.1%	26.6%
Political Identity	Conservative	-	81.3%	16.5%
	Center-middle	-	57.4%	39.3%
	Progressive	-	56.2%	42.7%

Note 1: Table reconstructed from Asan Institute data, the original data shows age-group as decades (30s, 40s, etc).

Note 2: The original data has not given statistics for the categorized sample size and region.

<sup>198</sup> Adapted from James Kim, Choong-gu Kang, Yumi Ko, Scott Snyder, and Ellen Swicord, "South Korean Perception of the US-ROK alliance and USFK," *Asan Institute for Policy Studies*, February 28, 2019, <http://www.asaninst.org/contents/%ED%95%9C%EB%AF%B8%EB%8F%99%EB%A7%B9%EA%B3%BC-%EC%A3%BC%ED%95%9C%EB%AF%B8%EA%B5%B0%EC%97%90-%EB%8C%80%ED%95%9C-%ED%95%9C%EA%B5%AD%EC%9D%B8%EC%9D%98-%ED%83%9C%EB%8F%84/>.

The poll was conducted in January 2019 as a part of the Asan Institute's comprehensive assessment of the U.S.-ROK alliance and USFK. Before this poll was conducted, there were two events that happened that could have a potentially negative impact on South Korean perception of the U.S.-ROK relations. First, the military tension was reduced between North Korea and South Korea due to Panmunjom Declaration and Moon Administration's effort to create a peaceful atmosphere. Since deterrence of North Korean threat is the *raison d'être* for the U.S.-ROK alliance, the easement of tension between two Koreas could raise questions for the necessity of the U.S. forces in Korea. Second, the Special Measures Agreement (SMA) negotiation for defense burden-sharing became the hot issue as the Trump Administration requested a dramatic increase in share cost to ROK.<sup>199</sup> Although the SMA was signed in February 2019, this left much South Korean public outraged on the U.S. demand and made many South Koreans concern about the U.S. commitment toward the 66-year old alliance. Thus, the following poll results could potentially show the effects of this recent friction in the relationship between the United States and South Korea.

However, even with the negative image of USFK and the United States, the opinion poll results show that 62.5% of South Korean respondents are trusting the United States troops in Korea. Even the most anti-American generation, the Democratic Generation, and the self-identified progressives answered favorably towards the USFK (more than half of the respondents in these groups are trusting USFK). The Transition/386 Generation is not as confrontational as expected (results are similar to those of the New Generation), and the New and War generations show strong support to the U.S. troops as expected based on the cohort analysis.

## **2. Perception of U.S. Forces Stationing in Korea**

The next opinion poll was taken from the same Asan Institute study with the first poll. The intention of this question is slightly different from the previous question. The

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<sup>199</sup> Kyle Ferrier, "The US-South Korea Military Cost-Sharing Agreement Has Expired. Now What?," *The Diplomat*, January 4, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/the-us-south-korea-military-cost-sharing-agreement-has-expired-now-what/>.

previous question was asking how South Koreans feel about the U.S. forces, but this question is about South Korean perception of the physical presence of the U.S. military in the Korean peninsula. A physical presence of foreign military force is a sensitive issue, both politically and national autonomy, especially in Korea that has a history of multiple foreign interruptions and imperialistic occupation. However, at the same time, the South Korean population believes its “blood-tied alliance” with the United States, and people trust the USFK to protect them from the regional security threats. Thus, this opinion poll will shed light on South Korean perception of U.S. forces stationing in Korea. The poll question asked is: How do you feel about the continued U.S. military station in Korea? The result shows in Table 16.

Table 16. South Korean Perception of U.S. Military Stationing in Korea  
(January 2019)<sup>200</sup>

		Sample Size	Approve	Disapprove
Total		1000	67.7%	29.8%
Region	Seoul	-	-	-
	Gyeong-gi	-	-	-
	Gangwon	-	-	-
	Chung-cheong	-	-	-
	Jeolla	-	-	-
	Gyeong-buk	-	-	-
	Gyeong-nam	-	-	-
	Jeju	-	-	-
Generation	New	-	64.1%	33.2%
	Democratic	-	62.1%	37.9%
	Transition	-	63.3%	33.7%
	War	-	79.6%	17.1%
Political Identity	Conservative	-	82.8%	16.4%
	Center-middle	-	68.3%	29.5%
	Progressive	-	55.6%	42.9%

Note 1: Table reconstructed from Asan Institute data, the original data shows age-group as decades (30s, 40s, etc) and by gender.

Note 2: The original data has not given statistics for the categorized sample size and region.

<sup>200</sup> Adapted from James Kim, Choong-gu Kang, Yumi Ko, Scott Snyder, and Ellen Swicord, “South Korean Perception of the US–ROK alliance and USFK.”

The result in Table 16 shows distinct generational differences and follows overall similar generational characteristics. The oldest War Generation was expected to show a strong approval rate of continued U.S. military presence in Korea since these older people were the ones who directly witnessed the U.S. military fought for South Korea against the communist invasion. After the War Generation, the cohort analysis suggests that weaker support for U.S. military presence from the younger generations. However, each of the younger generations (Transition/386, Democratic, New) has different motives behind its weaker support. The motive of Transition/386 Generation comes from its supportive tendency towards North Korea, whereas the Democratic Generation from its anti-American sentiment and the New Generation from its self-confidence that South Korea is strong enough to protect itself. Compared to the first poll results about the credibility, Figure 12 illustrates the generational difference shown from the two questions about South Korean perception towards USFK.

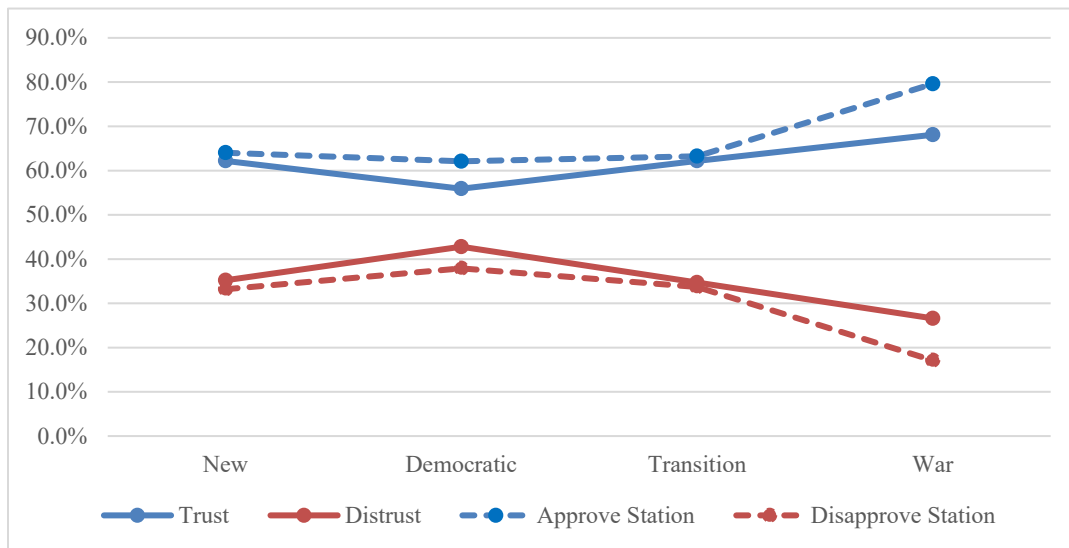


Figure 12. Comparison of Poll Results Between USFK Credibility and South Korean Support for Continued USFK Station in Korea<sup>201</sup>

<sup>201</sup> Adapted from James Kim, Choong-gu Kang, Yumi Ko, Scott Snyder, and Ellen Swicord, “South Korean Perception of the US–ROK alliance and USFK.”

Overall, all four South Korean generations acknowledge the necessity of the U.S. military presence in South Korea. The poll results show a higher approval rate for continued USFK station than the USFK credibility rate in all four generations. The shapes of trend lines look similar to each other, with some amplitude variation shown from the War Generation and the Democratic Generation. Therefore, the generational characteristics towards USFK, which were identified in Chapter II, are confirmed by these two poll questions from the Asan Institute.

### **3. Perception of Defense Burden Sharing**

The third opinion poll highlights one of the most conflictual and sensitive topics in the U.S.-ROK alliance. Defense Burden Sharing is a multi-faceted issue to South Koreans that it impacts domestic politics, national security, diplomatic relations, and economy. Thus, the result might not exactly follow the generational characteristic of the national security issue and the generational perception of the United States. The exact verbiage of the poll question asked is: How should ROK negotiate the next year's defense burden sharing with the United States? The poll results are shown in Table 17.



Table 17. South Korean Perception of USFK and Defense Cost Sharing  
(August 2019)<sup>202</sup>

		Sample Size	Freeze at Current Amount	Lower the Sharing Cost	Raise the Sharing Cost	No answer
Total		500	49.9%	25.2%	11.5%	13.4%
Region	Seoul	105	46.4%	16.8%	18.1%	18.6%
	Gyeong-gi	166	60.3%	21.0%	8.9%	9.9%
	Gangwon	16	27.1%	29.6%	32.5%	10.8%
	Chung-cheong	41	36.8%	34.6%	10.5%	18.1%
	Jeolla	47	51.3%	28.1%	5.1%	15.4%
	Gyeong-buk	43	42.2%	33.3%	6.9%	17.6%
	Gyeong-nam	78	51.6%	30.2%	9.9%	8.3%
	Jeju	4	43.3%	17.3%	39.3%	0.0%
Generation	New	152	49.5%	21.4%	13.8%	15.3%
	Democratic	99	51.3%	22.8%	11.4%	14.4%
	Transition	113	50.7%	28.7%	11.1%	9.6%
	War	136	49.3%	30.2%	8.2%	12.3%
Political Identity	Conservative	95	43.8%	23.1%	18.7%	14.5%
	Center-middle	188	52.7%	23.8%	14.3%	9.2%
	Progressive	145	58.2%	24.5%	6.7%	10.6%

Note 1: Table reconstructed from Realmeter data, the original data shows age-group as decades (30s, 40s, etc).

The poll was conducted on August 9, 2019, as the New Secretary of Defense, Mark Esper, visited Korea for the first time to discuss various alliance issues including the SMA. Also a couple of days prior, President Trump tweeted that the defense burden sharing negotiation has begun, and South Korea has agreed to pay “substantially more.”<sup>203</sup> Since 1991, the ROK government contributed a portion of the cost required to stationing the U.S.

<sup>202</sup> Adapted from Realmeter, “ROK’s USFK Cost Sharing for the Next Year,” August 12, 2019, <http://www.realmeter.net/%EC%A3%BC%ED%95%9C%EB%AF%B8%EA%B5%B0-%EB%B0%A9%EC%9C%84%EB%B9%84-%EB%B6%84%EB%8B%B4%EA%B8%88-%EB%8F%99%EA%B2%B050-%EC%9D%B8%ED%95%98-25-%EC%9D%B8%EC%83%81-12/>.

<sup>203</sup> Haye-ah Lee, “U.S. says Trump has been clear on wanting allies to contribute more to defense,” *Yonhap News*, August 9, 2019, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20190809000351325>.

military in Korea. The South Korean burden share gradually increased to 1 trillion Korean Won (approximately US\$ 915 million).<sup>204</sup> However, Washington consistently pressured Seoul to increase the defense burden share five-folds, which drove the 11<sup>th</sup> SMA negotiation into the stalemate.

In this uneasy environment, the poll result shows that about half of South Korean people from all generations want to freeze the burden share at the current amount. The poll result also shows that the younger the people get, there is a higher amount of respondents who wants to raise the shared cost to maintain the U.S.-ROK alliance. Regionally, people from Seoul are more willing to raise the cost, and people from Chung-cheong province show more interest in lowering the cost from the current level. Statistics from Gangwon and Jeju province are not used since the sample size does not provide statistical relevancy. Self-identified political identity follows characterized tendencies, that the conservatives are more willing to raise the cost to maintain the alliance whereas the progressives are more interested in lowering the cost even the U.S.-ROK alliance relationship goes in jeopardy.

#### **4. Perception of Favorability of U.S. Presidents**

The last opinion poll is about the South Korean perception of U.S. presidents. The role and responsibility of the U.S. President are critical to the U.S.-ROK alliance, especially when the U.S. President has an executive power to mobilize the military under its authority.<sup>205</sup> This thesis compares two polls on the two most recent U.S. presidents (President Obama and President Trump) to capture an accurate picture of South Korean generational perception of the position, rather than on the person who is serving in that role. The first poll was taken in March 2018, under the term of President Trump, and the second poll was taken in September 2013, during the second term of President Obama. The question that both polls asked was: what is your perception of the current U.S. President? The opinion poll results are shown in Table 18.

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<sup>204</sup> Haye-ah Lee, "U.S. says Trump has been clear on wanting allies to contribute more to defense," *Yonhap News*, August 9, 2019, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20190809000351325>.

<sup>205</sup> "War Powers," Library of Congress, October 15, 2019, <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/usconlaw/war-powers.php>.

Table 18. South Korean Perception of U.S. Presidents (September 2013/  
March 2018)<sup>206</sup>

		Trump (March 2018)				Obama (September 2013)			
		Sample Size	Favorable	Not Favorable	No answer	Sample Size	Favorable	Not Favorable	No answer
Total		1003	24.0%	67.0%	9.0%	1207	71.0%	16.0%	13.0%
Region	Seoul	199	28.0%	65.0%	7.0%	-	-	-	-
	Gyeong-gi	298	22.0%	68.0%	11.0%	-	-	-	-
	Gangwon	29	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Chung-cheong	106	23.0%	68.0%	9.0%	-	-	-	-
	Jeolla	102	19.0%	72.0%	9.0%	-	-	-	-
	Gyeong-buk	106	21.0%	69.0%	10.0%	-	-	-	-
	Gyeong-nam	151	26.0%	65.0%	9.0%	-	-	-	-
	Jeju	12	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Generation	New	328	19.4%	71.3%	9.3%	459	73.6%	15.4%	11.1%
	Democratic	216	17.0%	78.0%	5.0%	263	63.0%	22.0%	15.0%
	Transition	208	23.0%	68.0%	10.0%	234	73.0%	10.0%	17.0%
	War	251	35.0%	53.0%	12.0%	253	75.0%	7.0%	18.0%
Political Identity	Conservative	252	35.0%	59.0%	6.0%	-	-	-	-
	Center-middle	249	18.0%	72.0%	11.0%	-	-	-	-
	Progressive	376	19.0%	74.0%	6.0%	-	-	-	-

Note 1: Table reconstructed from Gallup Korea data, the original data shows age-group as decades (30s, 40s, etc.).

Note 2: The original data has not given statistics for sample size smaller than 50.

Note 3: The original September 2013 poll data only provides the statistics for age-groups.

There is a big favorability rate difference between President Obama (overall 71% favorable) and President Trump (overall 24% favorable). The discrepancy between these two poll results seems very wide, but the trend line shows similar shapes as shown in Figure 13. This confirms that regardless of who sits in the position, South Korean generations hold particular perceptions on the top U.S. political leader based on the cohort characteristics.

<sup>206</sup> Adapted from Gallup Korea, "Gallup Report (20131007)," October 2013, <https://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=477>; Gallup Korea, "Daily Opinion (20180316)," March 2018, <https://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=911>.

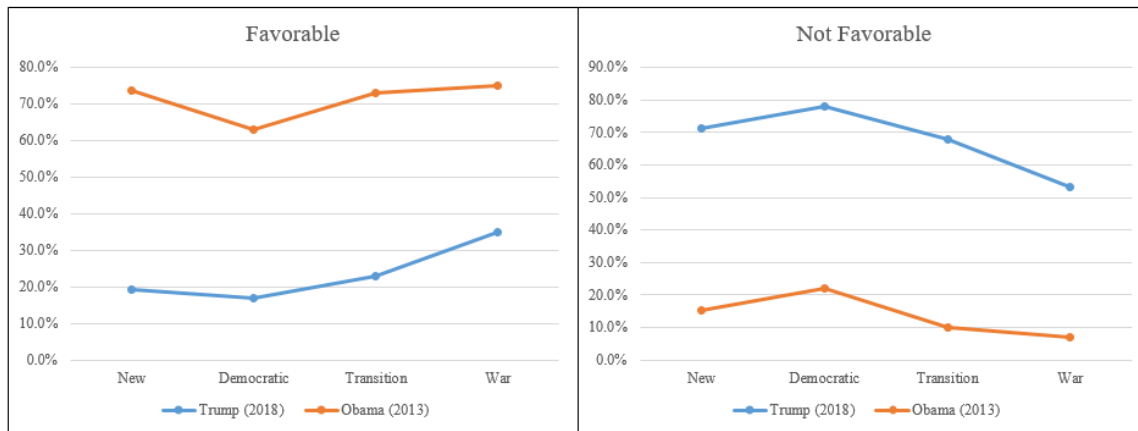


Figure 13. South Korean Opinion Poll Results on Favorability of U.S. Presidents, Reproduced from September 2013 and March 2018 Data<sup>207</sup>

The results follow the South Korean generational tendencies on the United States and the U.S.-ROK alliance, that are identified in Chapter II. The New and War generations, who are in the current age-group of 20s and 30s, and 60s and older, show a more favorable perception than the Democratic and Transition/386 generations, who are in the current age-group of 40s and 50s. This trend is consistent in both poll results, regardless of who is in the president's seat, as depicted in Figure 13.

## 5. Trend Analysis on Generational Perspectives—U.S.-ROK Alliance Issues

There are some common features that we confirmed from the opinion poll analysis over the South Korean generational perception of the U.S.-ROK alliance-related issues. First, all three public opinion poll graphs, except the poll on the defense burden share, depict a very similar pattern of a trend line. According to the shape of trend lines shown in Figure 14, the trend resembles those of North Korean issues—a U or V shape.

<sup>207</sup> Adapted from Gallup Korea, "Gallup Report (20131007);" Gallup Korea, "Daily Opinion (20180316)."

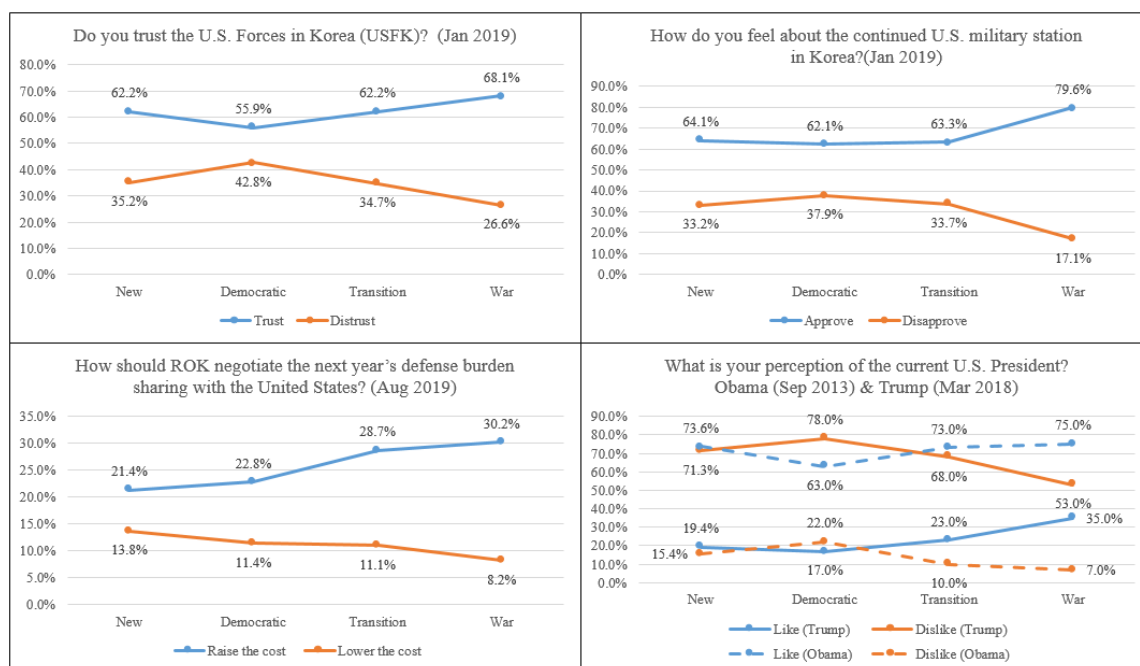


Figure 14. Generational Perspective on All Four U.S.-related Issues<sup>208</sup>

This shape represents that the New and War generations have more positive perceptions of relying on the United States for the security of South Korea. These two conservative generations trust the U.S. forces in Korea and support its presence in the Korean peninsula, as well as the U.S. leadership. However, the Democratic and Transition/386 generations, who are in their 40s and 50s, show more negative perceptions of the U.S.-ROK alliance compared to the New and War generations. The Democratic Generation, the most progressive generation in Korean society, seems to have the most anti-American sentiment as well. This could be the result of the anti-American sentiment that emerged after the Cold War. However, the cohort experience analysis suggests that this generation has a strong will to enhance the Korean national autonomy, and they see the U.S.-ROK alliance as an outdated Cold-War legacy, an obstacle that hinders ROK to achieve the full autonomy and self-defense.

<sup>208</sup> Adapted from James Kim, Choong-gu Kang, Yumi Ko, Scott Snyder, and Ellen Swicord, "South Korean Perception of the US-ROK alliance and USFK;" Realmeter, "ROK's USFK Cost Sharing for the Next Year;" Gallup Korea, "Gallup Report (20131007);" Gallup Korea, "Daily Opinion (20180316)."

As a separate issue, the defense burden sharing shows an unexpected outcome trend, which is different from the other three poll results. It shows a more linear line, representing that the New Generation is more willing to pay more cost as a defense burden share. This can be explained in a combination of its nationalistic idea of strong Korea and the sense of frustration caused by the increased regional instability. Also, the cohort experience analysis suggests that the War Generation should have a strong reliance on the U.S.-ROK alliance. However, the poll result shows that, as South Korean people get older, they are less supportive of the idea of increasing the cost. Rather, they want to lower the cost. Potentially, this discrepancy can be explained with the older generation's experience of a gradual increase in the defense sharing cost. Until 1991, there was no ROK contribution to U.S. forces stationed in Korea—other than the free lease of land and facilities under SOFA.<sup>209</sup> However, through the 1<sup>st</sup> SMA of 1991, ROK started to contribute to the stationing cost of USFK. The contribution cost increased from US\$150 million to US\$915 million in nearly 30 years.<sup>210</sup> The older generation who used to pay nothing for the USFK stationing cost could feel burdensome and uncomfortable to pay US\$1 billion (and President Trump request to raise the amount five-fold), which is not small money compared to approximately US\$40 billion total defense budget.<sup>211</sup> In sum, based on the trend analysis of the opinion polls related to the U.S.-ROK alliance, the New Generation, who is in 20s and 30s, is more willing to establish symmetric alliance while strengthening the alliance, whereas the Democratic Generation wants to move away from the alliance to enhance autonomy and neutrality of South Korea in the regional and global conflicts. The Transition/386 Generation strongly believe in the U.S.-ROK alliance despite its anti-American generational characteristics, and the War Generation, who directly witnessed the “blood-tied” alliance, is the stronghold of the U.S.-ROK alliance—while the older people think it is not fair to pay contribution for the USFK stationing in South Korea. Yet, overall,

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<sup>209</sup> Ministry of National Defense, *2016 Defense White Paper* (Seoul: Ministry of National Defense, 2016), 152.

<sup>210</sup> Ministry of National Defense, *2018 Defense White Paper* (Seoul: Ministry of National Defense, 2018), 178–79.

<sup>211</sup> Yonhap, “S. Korea’s 2020 defense budget rises 7.4% to over 50tr won,” *The Korea Herald*, December 11, 2019, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20191211000099>.

the majority of South Koreans, regardless of generations, still strongly believe that the U.S.-ROK alliance is both necessary and effective for ensuring the ROK national security.

### **C. GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON SOUTH KOREAN AUTONOMY/ SELF-DEFENSE**

From the ashes of the war, South Korea has transformed into one of the most developed nations in the world. Through this rapid transition in its national status, each generation in South Korea started to form different perceptions of its nation and different types of nationalism—these are discussed in detail in Chapter II. These different generational perceptions led to different perceptions of national autonomy. One group could think that ROK still needs a security guarantor for its survival, and tight alignment with a great power nation is necessary since South Korea is a small country. From the opposite end, another group could think that ROK is strong enough to protect itself, and South Korea should expand its autonomy on diplomacy, foreign policies, and inter-Korean relationship—away from the influence of other nations. Traditionally, as an allied nation under the U.S. sphere of influence, South Korea aligned with the U.S. interest and supported the U.S. decisions. However, recently there are some issues that challenge this relationship as ROK national interest does not necessarily align with the U.S. interest in those issues. This thesis will assess public opinion polls on these issues and check whether each generation follows its cohort characteristics and tendencies.

The expected generational tendencies can be drawn from the cohort-experience analysis in Chapter II. Unlike generational perceptions on North Korea and the U.S.-ROK alliance, generational perceptions on autonomy are more complicated and multifaceted, so each issue will be assessed separately without generalization of generational characteristics. However, one common theme that can be seen from the result is that generational tendencies on national autonomy depend on each generation's different ideas on nationalism and its subjective regional threat assessment surrounding the Korean peninsula.

#### **1. Perception of ROK–Japan Military Cooperation—GSOMIA**

The first opinion poll was selected to see how each South Korean generation perceives differently on the issue of General Security of Military Information Agreement

(GSOMIA)—a military intelligence share agreement between ROK and Japan. GSOMIA symbolizes the trilateral alliance among the United States, Japan, and South Korea against the North Korean threat and potentially rising China. However, the diplomatic dispute between ROK and Japan has led the South Korean government’s decision to terminate GSOMIA. Although the ROK government eventually repealed its decision and continued this military agreement with Japan, it revealed the current ROK administration’s assessment on regional security, and its willingness to abandon the trilateral alliance if needed. The opinion poll was taken amidst the ROK government’s decision to terminate GSOMIA. The poll question asked was: Do you agree with the government’s decision to terminate GSOMIA? The opinion poll result is shown in Table 19.

Table 19. South Korean Perception of Terminating GSOMIA (August 2019)<sup>212</sup>

		Sample Size	Agree (Terminate)	Disagree (Extend)	No answer
Total		1004	53%	28%	19%
Region	Seoul	193	51%	37%	13%
	Gyeong-gi	307	55%	26%	19%
	Gangwon	33	-	-	-
	Chung-cheong	104	52%	28%	19%
	Jeolla	102	65%	11%	24%
	Gyeong-buk	100	43%	34%	24%
	Gyeong-nam	150	55%	27%	17%
	Jeju	15	-	-	-
Generation	New	318	60%	22%	19%
	Democratic	191	68%	21%	11%
	Transition	215	52%	35%	13%
	War	280	34%	36%	29%
Political Identity	Conservative	252	35%	52%	13%
	Center-middle	293	56%	30%	14%
	Progressive	280	80%	9%	10%

Note 1: Table reconstructed from Gallup Korea data, the original data shows age-group as decades (30s, 40s, etc).

Note 2: The original data has not given statistics for sample size smaller than 50.

<sup>212</sup> Adapted from Gallup Korea, “Daily Opinion (20190830),” August 2019, <https://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=1042>.



The results show that there is a significant left-right politic over the GSOMIA issue. Self-identified political identity suggests that the progressives are more supportive of the government's decision to terminate GSOMIA (80% supporting government's decision), whereas the conservatives are more inclined to continue the GSOMIA (35% supporting government's decision). The regional tendencies also suggest that this issue has a significant left-right politics (e.g., division between Jeolla and Gyeong-buk provinces). However, generationally, the explanation of this issue is more complicated. First, it does not follow South Korean generational perception of Japan nor the generational participating rate of boycotting Japanese products. For example, as shown in Figures 15, the majority of the New Generation wants to terminate the GSOMIA, but people from the New Generation have more favorable feelings towards Japanese, and they have the largest number of people among all four generations who are not participating in the boycott movement.

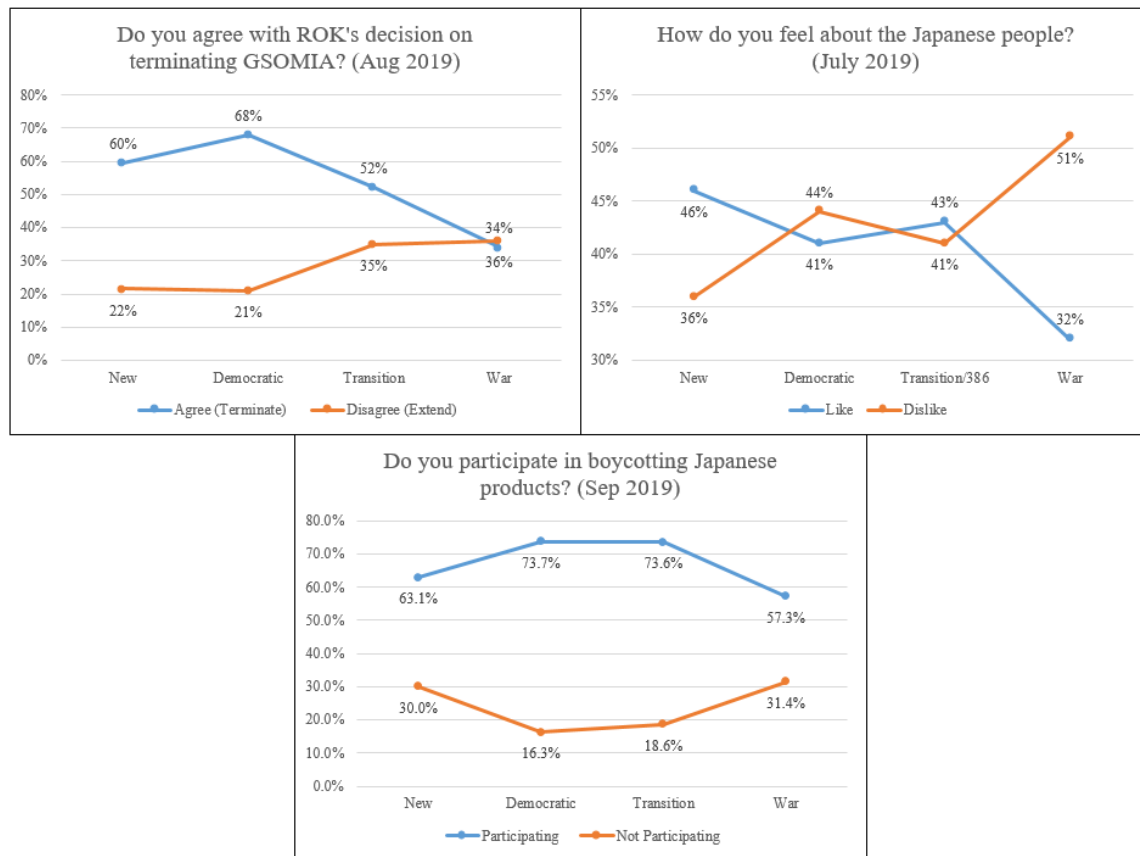


Figure 15. Comparison of South Korean Public Poll Results on Japan-related Issues<sup>213</sup>

Thus, the issue of GSOMIA is more than just another sample depiction of anti-Japanese nationalism in Korean generations, but a combination of nationalism and generational perception of their self-help national security. Based on the poll results, one can say the younger generations believe that North Korea is not as a big threat to South Korea, and South Korea is strong enough to not rely on GSOMIA and trilateral alliance for its defense. However, the older generations, especially the War Generation, could believe that North Korea continues to carry a serious threat to South Korea, and South Korea is not strong enough to ensure its own security and needs to strengthen the trilateral alliance to fight against the common threat. Therefore, the generational tendencies shown in this issue

<sup>213</sup> 213 Adapted from Gallup Korea, “Daily Opinion (20190830);” Gallup Korea, “Daily Opinion (20190712).”

do not deviate from the cohort characteristics on autonomy analyzed in Chapter II, but it requires a comprehensive approach to explain the generational tendencies.

## **2. Perception of Wartime Operational Control (OPCON) Transfer**

The second poll is about wartime Operational Control (OPCON) transfer. OPCON is regarded as a key issue that is directly related to South Korean autonomy, as it refers to South Korea's authority to command its own military forces during contingencies. At the break of the Korean War, the ROK government gave the UN Forces commander the authority to control the ROK military to effectively conduct the war effort. Since then, USFK Commander had this authority until the ROK-US Combined Forces Command resumed the authority in 1978.<sup>214</sup> The peacetime OPCON was transferred to the ROK government in 1994, with the promise to transfer the wartime OPCON in the near future. However, the North Korean nuclear threat erupted suddenly, and wartime OPCON transition was delayed until the ROK military is fully capable of ensuring its defense.<sup>215</sup> South Korean public believes that OPCON transfer has a symbolic meaning of autonomy.<sup>216</sup> Thus, this opinion poll gives a good assessment of South Korean generational perception of its national autonomy. The poll question asked was: What do you think about the government's decision to postpone the OPCON transfer? Unfortunately, there was no poll data found that was conducted more recently. This can impact the integrity of the age-group analysis by shifting each generational year-group by five-or-so years. With this condition, this thesis is using another newer poll results to augment the data for the accurate representation of generational tendencies. The opinion poll result is shown in Table 20.

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<sup>214</sup> Clint Work, "The Long History of South Korea's OPCON Debate," *The Diplomat*, November 01, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/the-long-history-of-south-koreas-opcon-debate/>.

<sup>215</sup> Clint Work, "South Korea: Dependence in the Age of OPCON," *The Diplomat*, July 09, 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/07/south-korea-dependence-in-the-age-of-opcon/>.

<sup>216</sup> Clint Work, "The Long History of South Korea's OPCON Debate," *The Diplomat*, November 01, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/the-long-history-of-south-koreas-opcon-debate/>.

Table 20. South Korean Perception of Delaying the OPCON Transfer  
(October 2014)<sup>217</sup>

		Sample Size	Delay	As Planned	No answer
Total		1023	51.0%	32.0%	18.0%
Region	Seoul	233	67.0%	18.0%	3.0%
	Gyeong-gi	299	61.0%	19.0%	7.0%
	Gangwon	23	-	-	-
	Chung-cheong	94	51.0%	24.0%	12.0%
	Jeolla	108	65.0%	17.0%	1.0%
	Gyeong-buk	98	67.0%	18.0%	6.0%
	Gyeong-nam	157	64.0%	18.0%	4.0%
	Jeju	11	-	-	-
Generation	New	352	42.0%	41.0%	18.0%
	Democratic	200	49.0%	37.0%	14.0%
	Transition	235	59.0%	25.0%	16.0%
	War	236	61.0%	17.0%	22.0%
Political Identity	Conservative	-	-	-	-
	Center-middle	-	-	-	-
	Progressive	-	-	-	-

Note 1: Table reconstructed from Gallup Korea data, the original data shows age-group as decades (30s, 40s, etc).

Note 2: The original data has not given statistics for sample size smaller than 50.

Note 3: The original data has not given statistics for self-identified political identities.

The results follow the expected generational tendencies. The older generation is more supportive of the government's decision to delay the OPCON transition, whereas the younger the people get, people get more disapproving of the government's decision. According to the more recent data in 2019 by Asan Institute, South Koreans are still widely divided on OPCON transfer (Figure 16).

<sup>217</sup> Adapted from Gallup Korea, "Daily Opinion (20141031)," October 2014, <https://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=589>.

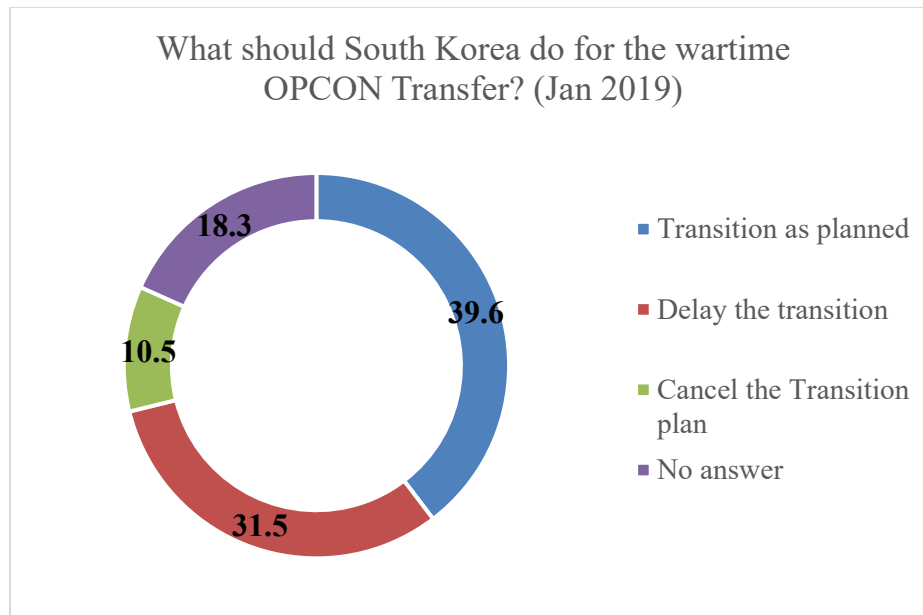


Figure 16. South Korean Public Poll Results on OPCON Transfer Issues, Reproduced from the Asan Institute Data<sup>218</sup>

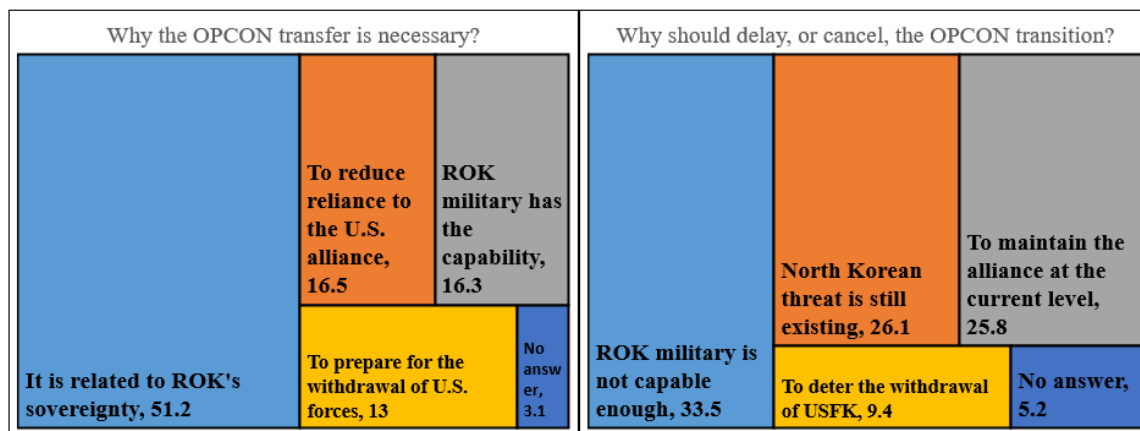


Figure 17. In-depth Assessment of Public Poll Responses, Reproduced from the Asan Institute Data<sup>219</sup>

<sup>218</sup> Adapted from James Kim, Choong-gu Kang, Yumi Ko, Scott Snyder, and Ellen Swicord, "South Korean Perception of the US-ROK alliance and USFK."

<sup>219</sup> Adapted from James Kim, Choong-gu Kang, Yumi Ko, Scott Snyder, and Ellen Swicord, "South Korean Perception of the US-ROK alliance and USFK."

Although Asan Institute does not provide the generational details on its poll results, it gives a deeper assessment of why people responded in that way. As shown in Figure 17, South Koreans expressed their reasons for their response to the poll. Among the people who answered the OPCON transfer is necessary, 80.7% of respondents said it is necessary because OPCON is related to ROK's autonomy (combining response rates of "It is related to ROK's sovereignty," "To reduce reliance to the U.S. alliance," and "To prepare for the withdrawal of U.S. forces"). Also, among the people who answered the OPCON should be delayed or canceled, 35.2% of respondents said OPCON should not be transitioned because it could harm the existing U.S.-ROK alliance (combining response rates of "To maintain the alliance at the current level," and "To deter the withdrawal of USFK").

### **3. Perception of the Conflict Between the United States and China**

The third opinion poll is about South Korean perception of emerging great power competition between the United States and China. If ever South Korean is asked to choose a side between two great power nations, what would ROK's decision be? The United States is "blood-tied ally," who defend and protect South Korea since the Korean War. China, on the other hand, is a traditional hegemon in the region for thousands of years. Currently, as a global economic powerhouse, China consists of more than one-quarter of South Korean gross national trade. To ROK, both the United States and China are an important global partner that has a symbiotic relationship with South Korea. Therefore, the public poll can provide a good gauge on which country the South Korean public values more. The poll question asked was: What should ROK do when the conflict between the United States and China gets worse? The opinion poll result is shown in Table 21.

Table 21. South Korean Perception of the Conflict Between the United States and China (July 2018)<sup>220</sup>

		Sample Size	Support U.S.	Support China	Remain Neutral
Total		1200	39.2%	7.6%	53.2%
Region	GSMA	601	44.6%	7.5%	47.9%
	Gangwon	35	30.6%	2.3%	67.1%
	Chung-cheong	128	32.5%	3.9%	63.7%
	Jeolla	116	38.7%	8.2%	53.2%
	Gyeong-sang	306	33.8%	10.0%	56.1%
	Jeju	14	16.2%	3.0%	80.8%
Generation	New	448	37.2%	6.3%	56.5%
	Democratic	259	41.3%	8.5%	50.2%
	Transition	260	42.2%	4.6%	53.2%
	War	233	37.4%	12.6%	50.0%
Political Identity	Conservative	212	44.4%	9.0%	46.6%
	Center-middle	577	38.7%	6.2%	55.1%
	Progressive	411	37.3%	8.9%	53.8%

Note 1: Table reconstructed from 2018 Unification Perception Survey data, the original data shows age-group as decades (30s, 40s, etc).

Note 2: Greater Seoul Metropolitan Area (GSMA) includes Seoul, Incheon, Gyeong-gi province.

Based on South Korean left-right political characteristics, conservatives are expected to value more on the traditional relationship with the United States, and progressives are expected to remain neutral between two powerful nations to maximize the national interest. The self-identified conservatives and progressives do follow these expected tendencies. However, the South Korean regional differences do not show a strong characteristic of this issue based on the result shown in Table 21. Jeolla province is expected to show more anti-American tendencies while the Gyeong-sang province shows more pro-American tendencies. These expected tendencies are not shown in the result.

<sup>220</sup> Adapted from Dong-jun Chung, Sun Kim, Hee-jung Kim, Yong-woo Na, In-cheol Moon, Young-hun Song, Gyu-bin Choi, Kyung-hun Im, and Jung-wook Lee, *2018 Unification Perception Survey* (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 2019), 365, <http://tongil.snu.ac.kr/x/sub710>.

Similarly, the generational results do not show these expected left-right political characteristics. The New Generation, despite it has a conservative tendency, could show more desire for self-help autonomy since it is also part of its generational tendency. However, the result of the War Generation is hard to understand with simple left-right political tendencies. The War Generation has lower support of the United States than the Transition/386 and Democratic generations, and the highest support of China among all four generations. This offbeat result could potentially be explained with the War Generation's experience of industrialization. Since March 2018, the Trump administration began the Trade War with China. Many South Koreans thought that the trade war was inevitable due to systematic differences between the two nations. However, as a generation who experienced the state-led industrialization (which is somewhat similar to China's developmental policy), the War Generation could think this U.S. attack on China as the tyranny of the United States.

#### **4. Perception of South Korean Nuclear Weapons Programs**

The last opinion poll is about South Korean perception of arming itself with nuclear weapons. To make a stronger case with data crosscheck, the poll data was taken from two sources. Both polls were conducted in September 2017, with the same question asked by two different polling agencies: Should ROK arm itself with the nuclear weapon? The results are shown in Table 22, and results from two sources are following similar patterns—which confirms the accurate representation of the South Korean perception at that time.



Table 22. South Korean Perception of Arming with Indigenous Nuclear Weapons (September 2017)<sup>221</sup>

		Gallup (September 2017)				Realmeter (September 2017)			
		Sample Size	Agree	Disagree	No answer	Sample Size	Agree	Disagree	No answer
Total		1004	60.0%	35.0%	4.0%	506	53.5%	35.1%	11.4%
Region	Seoul	207	50.0%	44.0%	6.0%	138	49.1%	41.0%	9.9%
	Gyeong-gi	306	58.0%	38.0%	4.0%	147	55.4%	36.0%	8.6%
	Gangwon	28	-	-	-	22	39.8%	29.6%	30.7%
	Chung-cheong	107	64.0%	34.0%	2.0%	41	59.8%	29.1%	11.0%
	Jeolla	102	63.0%	30.0%	7.0%	53	42.7%	47.0%	10.3%
	Gyeong-buk	85	67.0%	28.0%	4.0%	32	74.6%	10.8%	14.6%
	Gyeong-nam	148	64.0%	34.0%	2.0%	64	48.6%	38.2%	13.2%
	Jeju	11	-	-	-	9	40.8%	40.3%	18.9%
Generation	New	354	41.3%	53.7%	5.0%	152	45.2%	43.2%	11.6%
	Democratic	198	52.0%	42.0%	5.0%	111	40.2%	55.4%	4.4%
	Transition	199	74.0%	23.0%	3.0%	124	62.0%	31.0%	7.0%
	War	253	83.0%	14.0%	3.0%	119	71.6%	8.7%	19.7%
Political Identity	Conservative	247	74.0%	21.0%	4.0%	116	81.4%	15.9%	2.6%
	Center-middle	279	58.0%	38.0%	4.0%	195	49.3%	37.8%	13.0%
	Progressive	353	47.0%	48.0%	4.0%	142	37.9%	54.3%	7.8%

Note 1: Table reconstructed from Gallup Korea data, the original data shows age-group as decades (30s, 40s, etc).

Note 2: The original Gallup Korea data has not given statistics for sample size smaller than 50.

In modern history, a nuclear weapon has a special meaning to one's national defense. Nuclear capability almost guarantees a deterrence of hostile aggression by enemies. Also, to deter a state with nuclear capability, one also needs to possess a nuclear

<sup>221</sup> Adapted from Gallup Korea, "Daily Opinion (20170908)," September 2017, <https://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=860>; Realmeter, "Public Perception of South Korean Nuclear Weapons Development and Deployment," September 13, 2017, [http://www.realmeter.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/tbs-%EB%A6%AC%EC%96%BC%EB%AF%B8%ED%84%B0-%ED%98%84%EC%95%88%EC%A1%B0%EC%82%AC-%EB%B3%B4%EB%8F%84%ED%86%B5%EA%B3%84%ED%91%9C-%ED%95%B5%EB%AC%B4%EA%B8%B0-%EA%B0%9C%EB%B0%9C%C2%B7%EB%8F%84%EC%9E%85%EC%97%90-%EB%8C%80%ED%95%9C-%EA%B5%AD%EB%AF%BC%EC%9D%B8%EC%8B%9D\\_%EC%B5%9C%EC%A2%85.pdf](http://www.realmeter.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/tbs-%EB%A6%AC%EC%96%BC%EB%AF%B8%ED%84%B0-%ED%98%84%EC%95%88%EC%A1%B0%EC%82%AC-%EB%B3%B4%EB%8F%84%ED%86%B5%EA%B3%84%ED%91%9C-%ED%95%B5%EB%AC%B4%EA%B8%B0-%EA%B0%9C%EB%B0%9C%C2%B7%EB%8F%84%EC%9E%85%EC%97%90-%EB%8C%80%ED%95%9C-%EA%B5%AD%EB%AF%BC%EC%9D%B8%EC%8B%9D_%EC%B5%9C%EC%A2%85.pdf).

capability to balance the asymmetrical power. Historically, the United States provided nuclear deterrence for South Korea. However, since the 1990s, North Korea started to develop its nuclear weapon, and it successfully tested a high yield bomb in September 2017. Now South Korea has two options to balance against the North Korean nuclear threat. One is relying on the nuclear umbrella provided by the United States, and another is developing its own. Therefore, these South Koreans public opinion polls taken in September 2017 provide a good gauge on South Korean perception of owning a nuclear weapon as a self-defense, and how each political/generational group forms its perception toward this issue.

Based on the poll results, the self-identified conservatives strongly desire to possess nuclear weapons. The progressives still show a relatively high approval rate to possess a nuclear weapon, but it is about half of what the conservatives have shown (74-81% conservatives vs. 37-47% progressives). Regionally, the Realmeter data show an expected left-right division among the provinces, but the Gallup Korea data does not show these tendencies. Generationally, as shown in Figure 18, both poll data suggest that the younger generations (New and Democratic generations) have less desire to possess nuclear weapons, whereas the older generations (Transition/386 and War generations) have a stronger desire for indigenous nuclear capability.

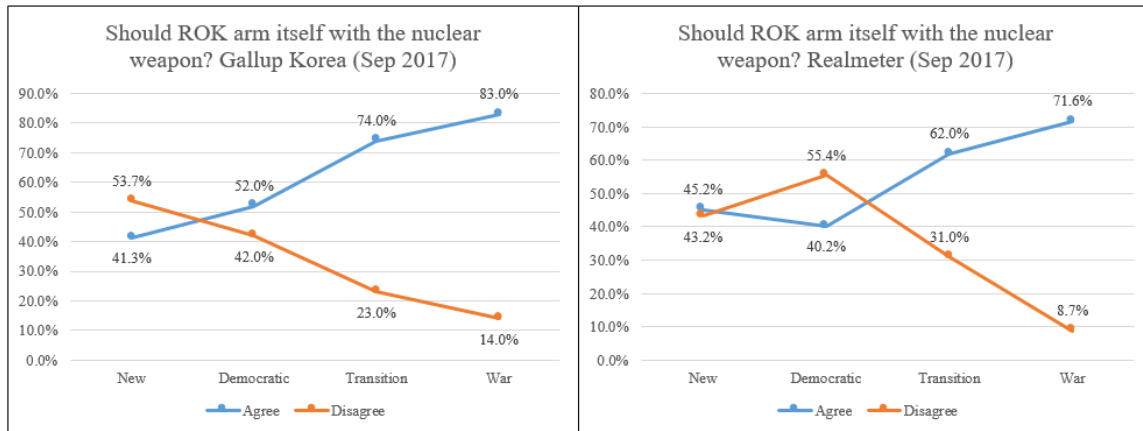


Figure 18. Comparison of South Korean Public Poll Results on Nuclear Weapons Self-Arming Issues<sup>222</sup>

This result does not correlate with the expected generational tendencies since the younger generations are expected to show more eagerness towards the self-help autonomy and national defense by acquiring the nuclear weapon than the older generations. The unexpected outcome could be explained with the liberal institutional value which was taught after the Cold War is over (both Democratic and New Generations received public education under the post-Cold War values). According to these new values, based on new orders under the United States, a nuclear weapon is against international law (UN NPT), and it is a source of destruction rather than the security guarantor. Thus, the younger generation could believe that possessing a nuclear weapon is not a viable option, but rather they want to make nuclear-free Korea.

## 5. Trend Analysis on Generational Perspectives—Autonomy Issues

The poll results on the South Korean autonomy and self-help national defense issues show a consistent trend that can be seen in Figure 19. All four poll results have a linear-shape trend line, which suggests that the generational difference is rooted in the aging effect. The younger they are, people have more strong tendency towards autonomy and national sovereignty, and as people get older, they start to seek more stability and

<sup>222</sup> Adapted from Gallup Korea, “Daily Opinion (20170908);” Realmeter, “Public Perception of South Korean Nuclear Weapons Development and Deployment.”

assurance through relying on the U.S. alliance. Also, the trend line suggests that left-right political tendencies are not the most deterministic in the autonomy issues, since generations do not seem to follow its conservatism or progressivism in these four issues, but rather following the simple aging effect. For example, the New Generation and War Generation are the conservative generations in South Korean society. However, on the GSOMIA issue, the War Generation is more willing to extend GSOMIA with Japan even with its anti-Japanese sentiments, and the New Generation, despite its relatively good perceptions towards Japan, wanted to terminate the GSOMIA. Also, on the issue of the United States–China conflict, the generations with anti-American tendencies (the Democratic and Transition/386) showed higher support rate for the United States, while the New Generation, who values the U.S.-ROK alliance against the North Korean threat, showed the highest support for neutrality among all South Korean generations. Thus, this thesis suggests that the issues regarding national autonomy are a significant factor that differentiates the generation in South Korea.

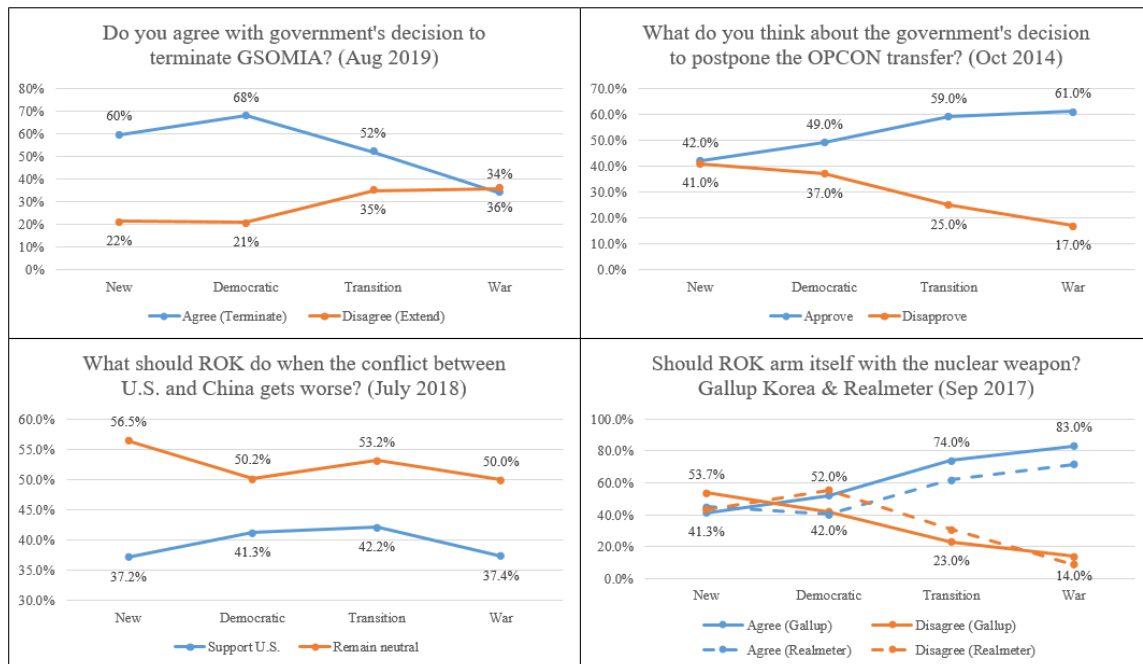


Figure 19. Generational Perspective on Autonomy-Related Issues<sup>223</sup>

However, on the issue of possessing nuclear weapons, the trend suddenly reverses. The older people are more eager to possess indigenous nuclear capability when younger people are not enthusiastic about it. This thesis suggests that there could be a stronger generational tendency, such as the liberal institutional values, that overwhelms the generational tendencies on autonomy. Yet, the generational tendencies on autonomy can be regularly seen on the other three poll data, so the nuclear issue can be an irregularity.

<sup>223</sup> Adapted from Gallup Korea, “Daily Opinion (20190830);” Gallup Korea, “Daily Opinion (20141031);” Dong-jun Chung, Sun Kim, Hee-jung Kim, Yong-woo Na, In-cheol Moon, Young-hun Song, Gyu-bin Choi, Kyung-hun Im, and Jung-wook Lee, *2018 Unification Perception Survey*; Gallup Korea, “Daily Opinion (20170908);” Realmeter, “Public Perception of South Korean Nuclear Weapons Development and Deployment.”

## **IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **A. GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES AND IMPACTS**

This thesis has examined the issue of South Korean generational differences, and its implications for the U.S.-ROK alliance. Through assessing the cohort experiences that have shaped the generational characteristics and political tendencies, the South Korean society has identified into four generations: War, Transition/386, Democratic, and New. Each of these generations has shown distinct tendencies on key issues that are directly related to South Korean national security, such as issues about North Korea, the United States, and national autonomy from the U.S. influence. South Korean generational characteristics were tested using public opinion poll data. The test result confirms that there are significant generational differences that exist in South Korean society, and each generation's response to national security issues follows respective generational characteristics and political tendencies stemmed from the cohort-experience.

Among numerous cohort events that have formed the generations, there are four most critical events that distinguish one age-cohort from another. The first is the experience of the Korean War and the reconstruction. These experiences distinguish the oldest generation, the War Generation, from the younger generations. The second is the experience of the authoritarian regimes. This experience differentiates the older two generations, the War Generation and the Transition/386 Generation, from the younger two generations. The third experience is the Democratization of 1987. This experience distinguishes the Democratic Generation. The fourth experience is the 1997 IMF crisis. This experience distinguishes the youngest generation, the New Generation.

Through these unique historical environments and distinct cohort events, four generations have formed specific political tendencies and perceptions that are also closely aligned to the left-right political identities in South Korea. Also, these generational differences in terms of conservative-progressive politics are clearly identifiable in national security issues. These outcomes are shown in Table 23.

Table 23. South Korean Generational Perceptions on Three National Security Issues

	War	Transition/386	Democratic	New
Current Age (As of 2020)	61 and Older	51 – 60	40 – 50	20 – 39
Formative Years	Older – 1984	1975 – 1994	1985 – 2005	1996 – 2025
North Korea	Anti	Pro	Pro	Anti
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Memories of the Korean War</li> <li>- Anti-communism</li> <li>- Real existential threat from NK</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Anti-SK authoritarianism</li> <li>- Finding alternatives</li> <li>- Ethnic nationalism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Post-ideological Dichotomy</li> <li>- Supremacy over NK</li> <li>- Mood of inter-Korean reconciliation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increased NK provocations</li> <li>- Weaker ethnic nationalism</li> <li>- Untrustworthy NK actions</li> </ul>
United States	Pro	Anti	Anti	Pro
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Memories of the Korean War</li> <li>- Cold War alliance (Anti-communism)</li> <li>- U.S. being the benefactor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- U.S. supporting SK authoritarian regimes</li> <li>- Anti-Sadae</li> <li>- Ethnic nationalism (U.S. being the intruders)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Against ideological dichotomy</li> <li>- Desire for more autonomy</li> <li>- Obstacle for inter-Korean reconciliation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Security/stability guarantor</li> <li>- Practical Nationalism</li> </ul>
Autonomy	Anti	Pro->Anti	Pro	Pro
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Patron-Client relationship</li> <li>- Priorities in stability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ethnic sovereignty</li> <li>- Anti-Sadae</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Confidence from Strong Korea</li> <li>- Maturing Democracy</li> <li>- Hatred towards unfairness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Practical Nationalism</li> <li>- Globalization</li> <li>- Hatred towards unfairness</li> </ul>

Note 1: For a more detailed analysis of generational characteristics, refer to Table 7.

The generational differences are largely formed by the cohort effect. This can be seen by consistent generational tendencies on different security issues. For example, the Democratic Generation showed a more favorable attitude towards North Korea and a more negative attitude towards the United States in all assessed poll results despite the political atmosphere and threat assessment at the time of the poll. However, the New Generation, unlike the Democratic Generation, showed a negative attitude towards North Korea and a favorable attitude towards the United States in all of the same poll data.

There were some poll cases that have shown the aging effect from the older generations, especially from the more progressive-minded Transition/386 Generation. For example, the Transition/386 Generation expressed more conservative tendencies on the issues of autonomy, which is opposing the analyzed generational characteristics based on cohort experience. Thus, this thesis concludes that South Korean generations show a very strong cohort effect in their tendencies on national security issues, with some noticeable aging effect (conservatization) on the Transition/386 Generation.

Furthermore, this thesis concludes that the New Generation, a youngest South Korean generation who started to show more weight in South Korean politics, possesses more practical and rational perspectives towards its nation's security. This is a different attribute from the previous generations, which signifies weakened ideological and historical influences over this young political generation living in 21<sup>st</sup> century Korea. Instead of reacting emotionally, people from the New Generation try to think rationally, calculating what is more beneficial and hold more value to them. Their calculation is not only based on monetary/materialistic values but also on their identity and conscience. Strong strive for a fair and equal society is one exposed outcome of this rational tendency.



## B. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR U.S. POLICYMAKERS

The alliance between the United States and the ROK is often referred to as an “Alliance Forged in Blood.”<sup>224</sup> Throughout the 67-years of its history, there were many incidents and disputes that jeopardized this blood-tied relationship, but the alliance endured, and it remains as a critical component for South Korea’s politics and security. This endurance can be explained through different international relations (IR) theories. For example, the realists would argue that the alliance endured because of the persisted common security threat—North Korea, and maintaining the alliance is better serving both national interests of the United States and South Korea. The institutionalists would argue that the alliance endured because of the path dependency of the robust institutions (i.e., norms, rules, procedures), that became much cost-effective to maintain the alliance rather than terminate and creating a new one.<sup>225</sup> Either case, the U.S.-ROK alliance is firm, and the relationship between the two nations is stronger than what some people concern. This is well represented by the poll data as well. Despite the anti-American sentiments and urge for the national autonomy from the U.S. influence, the majority of South Koreans across all generations and regions support the alliance (see Table 15 and Table 16).

The issues that were discussed in this thesis are the issues that are ongoing in current South Korean politics. Further assessing public perceptions on these sets of issues would have real implications. In January 2020, South Korea decided to send ROK Navy as part of peacekeeping military deployment at Strait of Hormuz. Since the mid-2019, the United States has pressed ROK to participate in the International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC) as a U.S.-ally against Iran.<sup>226</sup> However, South Korea did not want to deteriorate the long-standing economic relationship with Iran, so it decided a compromised approach

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<sup>224</sup> William Stueck and Boram Yi, “‘An Alliance Forged in Blood’: The American Occupation of Korea, the Korean War, and the US–South Korean Alliance,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 33, no. 2 (April 1, 2010), 177–209.

<sup>225</sup> Celeste Wallander, “Institutional Assets and Adaptability: NATO after the Cold War,” *International Organization* 54, no. 4 (Autumn, 2000), 705–06.

<sup>226</sup> Hyun-duk Bang, “Kang Kyung-wha: Our Position Cannot Necessarily be the Same as the U.S. Position,” *Yonhap News*, January 09, 2020, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20200109076500001>.

by sending its Navy as an “anti-piracy campaign.”<sup>227</sup> While this issue of naval deployment was being discussed in South Korean congress, ROK Foreign Minister, Kang Kyung-wha stated, “I think the U.S. position and [South Korean] position cannot necessarily be the same, given the analysis of the situation and the bilateral relationship with the Middle East country.”<sup>228</sup> Her statement well summarizes the ongoing South Korean issue on national autonomy from the U.S. influence and its potential impact toward the U.S.-ROK alliance.

Also, the Korean ethnic-nationalism revived unresolved historical resentment towards Japan. As the relational gap between ROK and the Japanese government deepened over the matter of GSOMIA and historical disputes, the ethnic background and mustache of Ambassador Harry Harris, the U.S. Ambassador to South Korea, became a major issue. In December 2019, *The Korea Times* reported that the South Korean public found his mustache, combined with his Japanese-American ethnic background, as a disrespectful insult—that it reminded South Korea’s colonial history under the Japanese Governors-General, which all eight of them had a mustache.<sup>229</sup> This public outrage shows the persisting ethnic nationalism in South Korea that stemmed from the anti-Japanese and anti-Imperial sentiments. As such, generational characteristics based on the cohort effect provide relevant explanations on the position of the South Korean public and policymakers.

South Korea has sprinted to achieve its development for 60-years. Along with this full-rate development, the situation and environment surrounding South Korea and regional security have vastly had changed. To ensure a strong alliance, proper U.S. approaches and actions are required. First, the United States should reemphasize the necessity of an alliance system and alignments with its citizens. In the era of new great power competition, one of the most potent strengths that the United States possesses over other nations is its long-time allies. According to institutionalists, it is cheaper to maintain

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<sup>227</sup> Sang-mi Cha, “South Korea to deploy anti-piracy unit to the Strait of Hormuz,” *Reuters*, January 20, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southkorea-mideast/south-korea-to-deploy-anti-piracy-unit-to-the-strait-of-hormuz-idUSKBN1ZK06H>.

<sup>228</sup> Hyun-duk Bang, “Kang Kyung-wha: Our Position Cannot Necessarily be the Same as the U.S. Position,”

<sup>229</sup> Whan-woo Yi, “Politics of U.S. envoy’s moustache,” *The Korea Times*, December 29, 2019, [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2019/12/176\\_281044.html](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2019/12/176_281044.html).

an alliance than creating a new one.<sup>230</sup> Thus, consistent reinforcing of good relations with allies is critical to winning over other challenging powers.

To further strengthen the U.S.-ROK alliance, the U.S. policymakers should provide a rational and practical proposal, emphasizing the benefits and advantages (and/or consequences and disadvantages) of South Korea for maintaining the alliance and following the U.S. leadership in the era of great power competition. More specifically, the U.S. operation should focus more on media coverage and public information share targeting the New Generation in South Korea, emphasizing its nation's increased role in the global stage as a liberal-democratic nation and its associated responsibility. The young South Korean generation is willing to take more responsibility in this increased role when it gets that level of treatment and reception from the world partners—especially from the United States.

Recently, there is some unpleasant noise coming out from the areas of friction between the United States and South Korea, but it is actually a good opportunity to raise a strong relationship with South Korea to another level. As a Korean proverb, “the ground hardens after the rain,” the U.S.-ROK alliance is going through a rain squall. Once the rain passes, the relationship will become more firm. The United States should show generosity of sharing its umbrella with South Korea under the heavy rainfall. Squall will soon pass, and Sun will shine, and the U.S.-ROK alliance will become stronger.

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<sup>230</sup> Celeste Wallander, “Institutional Assets and Adaptability: NATO after the Cold War,” 705–06.

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